

THE PLAYFUL MIDDLE AGES

VISIT...

LANZAROTE
Caliente.COM

MEDIEVAL TEXTS AND CULTURES OF NORTHERN EUROPE

*Editorial Board under the auspices of the
Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Hull*

Wendy Scase, Chair, *University of Birmingham*

Adrian P. Tudor, Secretary, *University of Hull*

John H. Arnold, *Birkbeck College, University of London*

Julia Barrow, *University of Nottingham*

Lesley A. Coote, *University of Hull*

David Crouch, *University of Hull*

Paul Hardwick, *Leeds Trinity University College*

Alan Hindley, *University of Hull*

Advisory Board

Andrew Ayton, *University of Hull*

David Bagchi, *University of Hull*

Keith Busby, *University of Wisconsin–Madison*

Olle Ferm, *Stockholms universitet*

Wim Hüskens, *Stedelijke Musea Mechelen*

Gerhard Jaritz, *Central European University, Budapest*

Peter Meredith, *University of Leeds*

Veronica O'Mara, *University of Hull*

Nigel F. Palmer, *St Edmund Hall, Oxford*

Brigitte Schludermann, *University of Hull*

Michel Zink, *Collège de France, Membre de l'Institut*

Previously published volumes in this series are listed at the back of this book

THE PLAYFUL MIDDLE AGES
Meanings of Play and Plays of Meaning
Essays in Memory of Elaine C. Block

Edited by

Paul Hardwick



BREPOLS

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

The playful Middle Ages : meanings of play and plays of meaning, essays in memory of Elaine C. Block. – (Medieval texts and cultures of Northern Europe ; v. 23)

1. Play – Europe – History – To 1500. 2. Art and society – Europe – History – To 1500. 3. Civilization, Medieval. 4. Art, Medieval. 5. Middle Ages. 6. Europe – Social life and customs.

I. Series II. Block, Elaine C. III. Hardwick, Paul.

306.4'8'094'0902-dc22

ISBN-13: 9782503528809

© 2010, Brepols Publishers n.v., Turnhout, Belgium

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

D/2010/0095/117

ISBN: 978-2-503-52880-9

Printed on acid-free paper

CONTENTS

List of Illustrations	vii
List of Contributors	xiii
Introduction: Playing Close to the Edge PAUL HARDWICK	1
L'Origine des stalles du Musée Pouchkine de Moscou: la dernière expertise d'Elaine Block FRÉDÉRIC BILLIET	7
Playing Games in the Early French Theatre (1350–1550) ALAN HINDLEY	23
Games People Play NAOMI REED KLINE	45
The Foolishness of Old Age †CHRISTA GRÖSSINGER	61
Talking Dirty: Vernacular Language and the Lower Body PAUL HARDWICK	81
Sideways: Face-play on the Edge of Some Scottish Pot-querns, or A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Abbey M. A. HALL	93

L'Humour à travers les stalles de la cathédrale d'Amiens KRISTIANE LEMÉ-HÉBUTERNE	125
Un Croquemitaine dans les stalles SYLVIE BETHMONT-GALLERAND	143
Blingy Women, Saint Jerome's Mirth, and Grubby Devils: Play and the Old French <i>Vie des Pères</i> ADRIAN P. TUDOR	161
Fairy Tale or Hairy Tail? The Curious Creatures on Medieval Misericords S. J. F. S. PHILLIPS	175
Bestiaries in Wood? Misericords, Animal Imagery, and the Bestiary Tradition LUUK HOUWEN	195
Playing Dead: The Bestiary Fox on Misericords and in the <i>Roman de Renart</i> KENNETH VARTY	233

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figures

Figure 1, p. 13. Sellette de la première miséricorde (M1), Moscou, Musée Pouchkine de Moscou.

Figure 2, p. 14. Détail de la miséricorde (M1), Moscou, Musée Pouchkine de Moscou.

Figure 3, p. 15. Profil de parclose, Moscou, Musée Pouchkine de Moscou.

Figure 4, p. 15. Dessin de ‘profil des stalles basses’ par Viollet-le-Duc.

Figure 5, p. 15. Moulures de museau, Moscou, Musée Pouchkine de Moscou.

Figure 6, p. 16. Parclose terminale réaménagée, Moscou, Musée Pouchkine de Moscou.

Figure 7, p. 17. Miséricorde des joueurs de fifre et de tambour, Bordeaux, Saint-Seurin de Bordeaux.

Figure 8, p. 18. Miséricorde ‘L’aigle nourrit ses petits’ (M2), Moscou, Musée Pouchkine de Moscou.

Figure 9, p. 18. Appui-main ‘Homme vêtu d’un chaperon’ (AM 3–4), Moscou, Musée Pouchkine de Moscou.

Figure 10, p. 19. Cochons à l’orgue, Paris, Musée National du Moyen Âge de Paris.

Figure 11, p. 19. Aigle (M1), Moscou, Musée Pouchkine de Moscou.

Figure 12, p. 19. Nid (M2), Moscou, Musée Pouchkine de Moscou.

Figure 13, p. 19. Combat (M3), Moscou, Musée Pouchkine de Moscou.

Figure 14, p. 21. Personnage vêtu d'une aube (AM 1), Moscou, Musée Pouchkine de Moscou.

Figure 15, p. 21. Prière (AM 1–2), Moscou, Musée Pouchkine de Moscou.

Figure 16, p. 21. Chimère (AM 2–3), Moscou, Musée Pouchkine de Moscou.

Figure 17, p. 21. Homme en aube (AM 5), Moscou, Musée Pouchkine de Moscou.

Figure 18, p. 47. Cologne, Church of St Ursula.

Figure 19, p. 48. Game Box, French, ivory, fifteenth or sixteenth century.

Figure 20, p. 50. 'His key is too small for her lock', Sao Paolo, private collection. Pen-and-ink drawing with colour wash, Flemish, c. 1470.

Figure 21 (a and b), p. 53. Casket, wood, Minnekästchen with lovers, German (Alsatian), end of fourteenth century.

Figure 22, p. 55. Coffret, wood, end fifteenth century.

Figure 23, p. 56. Image taken from Heinrich Kohlhaussen, *Minnekästchen im Mittelalter* (Berlin: Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 1928), Kat. no. 47, Tafel 50 (Sammlung Prof. Dr W. Weisbach).

Figure 24, p. 57. Minnekästchen, wood, fourteenth century.

Figure 25, p. 59. Bridal casket, Northern Italy, cast and engraved silver, niello, partly gilt; second half of fifteenth century.

Figure 26, p. 63. From Sebastian Brant (1459–1521), *The Ship of Fools* (1494).

Figure 27, p. 66. Albrecht Dürer, *Mercenary Love*.

Figure 28, p. 67. Misericord, London, Westminster Abbey, Henry VII's Chapel.

Figure 29, p. 70. Hans Vogtherr the Younger, *Woman with Chastity Belt between Two Men*.

Figure 30, p. 71. Master of the Housebook, *The Planet Venus*.

Figure 31, p. 72. Erhard Schön, *The Triangle of Love*.

Figure 32, p. 73. Hans Baldung Grien, *Phyllis Riding Aristotle*.

Figure 33, p. 75. Master of the Banderolles, *Fountain of Youth*.

Figure 34, p. 76. Erhard Schön, *Fountain of Love or Youth*.

Figure 35, p. 78. Anonymous, *Furnace of Youth*.

Figure 36, p. 79. Anonymous, *Furnace of Youth*.

Figure 37, p. 80. Anonymous, *Rustic Couple*.

Figure 38, p. 82. Misericord, Basilique Mineure Saint-Materne in Walcourt, Belgium.

Figure 39, p. 90. Misericord, Saint-Gervais-Saint-Protais, Paris.

Figure 40, p. 97. The Braco face-quern, Perth.

Figure 41, p. 99. The Aberargie face-quern, Aberargie.

Figure 42, p. 101. The St Monance face-quern, Fife.

Figure 43, p. 102. The Cupar (St Christopher's) face-quern, Fife.

Figure 44, p. 103. The Ayr (St John's) face-quern, Ayr.

Figure 45, p. 105. The Crossraguel Abbey face-quern, Maybole.

Figure 46, p. 105. The Crossraguel Abbey sacristy corbel head, Maybole.

Figure 47, p. 107. The Crossraguel Abbey sacristy corbel triple face-mask, Maybole.

Figure 48, p. 108. The Glenluce abbey face-mortar.

Figure 49, p. 110. The Elgin Cathedral face-quern, Moray.

Figure 50, p. 111. The Gladsmuir face-quern.

Figure 51, p. 128. Femmes dévoilées, pendentif 85–86, stalles de la cathédrale d'Amiens.

Figure 52, p. 129. Fou regardant sa marotte, cul-de-lampe 30–31, stalles de la cathédrale d'Amiens.

Figure 53, p. 130. Fou portant ses enfants sur son dos, appui-main 26–27, stalles de la cathédrale d'Amiens.

Figure 54, p. 132. Renart prêche aux poules, appui-main 7–8, stalles de la cathédrale d'Amiens.

Figure 55, p. 133. Deux têtes sous le même bonnet, appui-main 53–54, stalles de la cathédrale d'Amiens.

Figure 56, p. 133. Deux chiens pour un os, rampe C52, stalles de la cathédrale d'Amiens.

Figure 57, p. 134. Je trompe le monde, le monde mangé des rats, frise d'accoudoir 107, stalles de la cathédrale d'Amiens.

Figure 58, p. 136. Le bourreau, rampe C51, stalles de la cathédrale d'Amiens.

Figure 59, p. 138. Dormition de Marie, revers, apôtres grimpés sur un banc, jouée L86, stalles de la cathédrale d'Amiens.

Figure 60, p. 140. Marie apprend à lire avec sa mère, jouée C52, stalles de la cathédrale d'Amiens.

Figure 61, p. 155. (a) 'Barbo', Cathédrale de Bâle (La Suisse); (b) 'Barbo', Abbaye de la Maigrauge (La Suisse); (c) 'Barbo', Straelen (Allemagne).

Figure 62, p. 156. (a) 'Musicien et Baboue', Cloître de Pampelune (1280–1340) (Espagne); (b) 'Musicien et Baboue', Cloître de Pampelune (1280–1340) (Espagne), détail.

Figure 63, p. 158. (a) 'Babils', Moudon (La Suisse); (b) 'Babils', Estavayer-le-Lac (La Suisse).

Figure 64, p. 159. (a) 'Fou-Baboue', Ulm, cathédrale (Allemagne); (b) 'Fou-Baboue', Ulm, cathédrale (Allemagne); (c) 'Fou-Baboue', Musée national du Moyen Âge, Paris (France); (d) 'Fou-Baboue', Abbaye-Blanche, Mortain (France); (e) 'Fou-Baboue', Saint-Michel-le-Notariat, Blainville-Crévon (France); (f) 'Fou-Baboue', Gif-sur-Yvette (France); (g) 'Fou-Baboue', Beverley Minster (Yorkshire, GB); (h) 'Fou-Baboue', Beverley Minster (Yorkshire, GB); (i) 'Fou-Baboue', San Salvador, Celanova (Ecuador).

Figure 65, p. 177. Medieval misericord, Durham Cathedral.

Figure 66, p. 180. Horse, Durham Cathedral.

Figure 67, p. 180. Dog, Durham Cathedral.

Figure 68, p. 181. Crab, Durham Cathedral.

Figure 69, p. 181. Unicorn Scene, Durham Castle.

Figure 70, p. 182. Pigs, Durham Castle.

Figure 71, p. 182. Eagle, Durham Castle.

- Figure 72, p. 205. Fox and goose, Ripon Cathedral, SSfW10.
- Figure 73, p. 207. Fox physician, Gloucester Cathedral, NSfW18.
- Figure 74, p. 208. Man and donkey, Gloucester Cathedral, SSfW29.
- Figure 75, p. 210. Hunter shooting at stag, Gloucester Cathedral, NSfW05.
- Figure 76, p. 212. Lion fighting a wyvern, Lincoln Cathedral, SSfWR1_28.
- Figure 77, p. 213. Griffin *passant*, Gloucester Cathedral, NSfW09.
- Figure 78, p. 214. Lion with protruding tongue, Lincoln Cathedral, NSfWR2_24.
- Figure 79, p. 220. Owl being mobbed, Gloucester Cathedral, SSfW09.
- Figure 80, p. 223. Griffin pecking at human leg, Ripon Cathedral, SSfW04.
- Figure 81, p. 224. Capture of the unicorn, Lincoln Cathedral, SSfWR1_05.
- Figure 82, p. 225. Tristan and Isolde with King Mark behind them. Lincoln Cathedral, SSfWR1_06.
- Figure 83, p. 226. Scene from *Tristan and Isolde* next to the capture of the unicorn. French ivory casket, London, British Museum (fourteenth century).
- Figure 84, p. 227. Knight dropping mirrors to pursuing tigress, Chester Cathedral, NSfW21.
- Figure 85, p. 240. Misericord, St Mary's Church, Nantwich, Cheshire.
- Figure 86, p. 241. Misericord, Chester Cathedral, Cheshire.
- Figure 87, p. 243. From *Queen Mary's Psalter: Miniatures and Drawings by an English Artist of the 14th Century: Reproduced from Royal MS. 2 B. VII in the British Museum*, intro. by George Warner (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1911), p. 156.

Maps

Map 1, p. 96. Map of Scottish sites mentioned in the text.

Tables

Table 1, p. 199. Animal misericords.

Table 2, p. 201. Number of Unique Animals.

Charts

Chart 1, p. 201. Distribution of Different Animal Types.

Chart 2, p. 201. Number of Unique Animals for each Location.

Chart 3, p. 202. Animals and Frequency (A–G).

Chart 4, p. 202. Animals and Frequency (G–W).

CONTRIBUTORS

Sylvie Bethmont-Gallerand, École cathédrale de Paris
Frédéric Billiet, Université Paris-Sorbonne, Paris IV
Christa Grössinger†, University of Manchester
M. A. Hall, Perth Museum & Art Gallery
Paul Hardwick, Leeds Trinity University College
Alan Hindley, University of Hull
Luuk Houwen, Ruhr-Universität Bochum
Naomi Reed Kline, Plymouth State University
Kristiane Lemé-Hébuterne, Université de Picardie-Jules Verne
S. J. F. S. Phillips, Durham University
Adrian P. Tudor, University of Hull
Kenneth Varty, University of Glasgow

INTRODUCTION: PLAYING CLOSE TO THE EDGE

Paul Hardwick

From child's play to love play, whether one is engaging in wordplay or playing the fool, playing a tune or playing dead, the notion of play inhabits all spheres of human activity. Indeed, more than half a century ago, Johan Huizinga suggested that play is itself one of the primary factors in shaping human culture.¹ The essays which follow draw together international scholars from a range of disciplines to explore aspects of playfulness in the later European Middle Ages. From manuscript to performance and from the domestic to the doctrinal, the exuberance and ambiguity of verbal and visual play is interrogated in order to decode layers of meaning in texts and artefacts and, in so doing, to explore the culture(s) which gave them form and utterance and which they, in turn, helped to generate.

The impetus behind this collection is a celebration of the work of the late Elaine C. Block, in particular the publication of her *Corpus of Medieval Misericords* volumes.² The five volumes of the *Corpus* will make accessible on a previously unknown scale an invaluable body of marginal iconography which may inform scholarship in all fields of medieval studies. Enigmatically tracing a line between sacred and profane, misericords see sanctity rubbing shoulders — not to mention many other anatomical features — with the scatological within the most sacred space of the medieval church, drawing the viewer into complex questions concern-

¹ Johan Huizinga, *Homo ludens: Proeve eener bepaling van het spelelement der cultuur* (Haarlem: Tjeenk Willink, 1938); trans. as *Homo ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949).

² On the occasion of her untimely death in 2008, two volumes had been published: *France* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003) and *Iberia* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005). Members of Misericordia International are working towards publication of the remaining volumes which were all in progress, beginning with *Belgium and the Netherlands* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010).

ing the nature of this division and, indeed, the ambiguity of such categories. The contributors to this volume, all of whom have worked with Elaine Block, are all interested in the play of meanings — whether textual or iconographic — which nuance our readings of late medieval thought and culture. The resulting exploration of notions of play — be it game, performance, jest, or dalliance — reaches across narrow boundaries to create a dynamic interdisciplinary conversation, essentially a play of mutually illuminating ideas. In so doing, it also serves to highlight the longstanding contribution that Elaine Block has made to medieval studies and her untiringly generous support of those bringing fresh insights and perspectives to the apparently profane arts.

The essays herein seek to explore manifestations of the playful beyond the more obvious spheres. Several essays deal with the playful within sacred spaces, asking how this may relate to the more overtly devotional aspects of word, art, and architecture. Others address the playfulness of anthropomorphism, the grotesque, or even the scatological, seeking to explain aspects of transgression of cultural norms. Finally, there are essays focusing upon wordplay — the joys and dangers of slippery language. Yet these topics are not discrete. From satire to the sacred, the play of words and images itself defies rigid structures, remaining an ongoing social act in which the modern commentator him/herself participates. As with other recent discussions of playfulness, humour, and the comic,³ the reader is invited to participate in this complex cultural dialogue.

Addressing the slipperiness of terminology, the association between games, gambling, and plays is effectively highlighted by the French term *jeu*, used throughout the Middle Ages and beyond to designate not only drama of all types, but also games and gambling. Alan Hindley examines the game motifs in a selection of plays from the considerable corpus of late medieval secular plays, notably the *sotties* and the *moralités*. Setting the scene, as it were, for the consideration of the bounds of playfulness to follow, he demonstrates how these motifs were employed to provide episodes of light relief and comic business at the same time as providing a real-life focus for those tendencies that set the sinner on the road to damnation: a telling mix of both the playful and the serious.

³ Of many works which could be cited, two recent collections edited by contributors to the present volume, and which include articles by Elaine Block, are *Grant risee? The Medieval Comic Presence / La Présence comique médiévale. Essays in Memory of Brian J. Levy*, ed. by Adrian P. Tudor and Alan Hindley, *Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe*, 11 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006); *Medieval English Comedy*, ed. by Sandra M. Hordis and Paul Hardwick, *Profane Arts of the Middle Ages*, 3 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007).

In considering the scenes which adorn a selection of elaborate boxes intended for domestic use, Naomi Reed Kline explores the rules of the game of courtship. These boxes were made as high-status gifts from men to women, in consequence of which both images and inscriptions negotiate a play of mores in which to lose oneself may, paradoxically, constitute winning. According to the plethora of popular prints which circulated from the close of the European Middle Ages, perhaps one of the greatest enemies of love is old age. Christa Grössinger traces the way in which the old were depicted as lecherous, greedy, and avaricious: in short, ruled by their bodily desires. The ugly features of women in particular were highlighted, resulting in an utter grotesqueness at extreme variance with the attractive youths adorning the objects in Kline's study, showing both sexes desperate to retain their youthful sexual abilities. Among the men, even those most renowned for their wisdom are duped by young women. These images of foolishness raise further aspects such as the social status of those most satirized, as well as their moral and satirical intent, their ability to instigate self knowledge or laughter, to teach, or to entertain.

Possibly the lowest, yet most enduring, form of comedy is the scatological, which coarsely rejoices in the faecal and other base bodily functions. It is the shock of the sudden breaking of taboo which elicits a seemingly instinctive response. Paul Hardwick's essay focuses on representations of these eruptions in both sacred and secular surroundings, suggesting that they in fact play on contemporary concerns about the growth in status of vernacular languages and their perceived inability to articulate elevated truths above the merely physical. M. A. Hall likewise addresses the apparently prosaic, in addressing a small group of stone pot-querns from sites — both ecclesiastical and secular — across Scotland. These objects are notable, however, for the shared decorative motif of a human face-mask, a feature which offers fascinating social-archaeological potential, carrying aspects of medieval humour and apotropaic traditions into the everyday world of food preparation. Much of Elaine Block's work focused upon instances of humour in sacred spaces; a theme which contributes to many of the essays in the present volume. As Kristiane Lemé-Hébuterne's essay reveals, even the most sacred space in the church building could provide a site for humour. Whilst the stalls of Notre-Dame Cathedral, Amiens, are justly known for the richness of their carved ornamentation, which combines non-figurative decoration with an iconography primarily religious in inspiration, humorous details abound in order to make the didactic message more attractive to the viewer. Such is the effect of playfulness across a unified decorative scheme. Sylvie Bethmont-Gallerand explores one type of playful/grotesque image across a range of European locations — the grimacing face which appears on countless surviving misericords and, as she cogently argues, offers a serious moral through its

expressive excess. Of course, these incursions of the playful as a didactic strategy in the service of devotional ends were not confined to the church choir, as Adrian P. Tudor's analysis of the Old French *Vie des Pères* — in particular the tale today known as *Queue* — shows us. Indeed, a leavening of playful laughter may be even more necessary when the stark messages of salvation and damnation are aimed at a lay audience.

Our final three essays may be considered as a sequence which moves from the widest possible focus to a specific motif as it addresses representations of animals on misericord carvings. S. J. F. S. Phillips approaches these carvings from an archaeological perspective, asking fundamental questions concerning the varieties of animals that were depicted and considering the play of possible meanings that they articulated. Luuk Houwen's article addresses the issue of sources for carvings of animals, specifically challenging the common perception that the bestiary tradition accounted for most of the animal imagery to be found beneath choir stalls. In comparing English misericords with bestiary texts, he makes the challenging suggestion that most misericord animals may well have primarily been purely decorative. In the final essay, Kenneth Varty considers one of the rare examples in which a bestiary creature is depicted on misericords — that of the fox playing dead. Although the fox, frequently in playfully mischievous guise, is one of the most common inhabitants of misericord carvings, this particular image only survives on two English misericords, both owing an equal debt to the *Roman de Renart*. The carvings, then, may be seen as existing between two different — apparently conflicting, even — traditions, in consequence of which, as with all the topics covered in this volume, a complex play of potential meanings is created. It is hoped that the investigations of these meanings which follow will offer both illumination and suggestions for further explorations.

On a personal note, it is fitting that this collection should close with a Reynardian essay, for it was at a Colloquium of the International Reynard Society that I first met Elaine Block. Following a session in which we had been programmed together, she beckoned me aside and said simply, 'we must do things together'. Elaine never beat about the bush when pouncing upon potential recruits to the misericordian cause, nor was she any more reticent in offering help, encouragement, and the benefits of her encyclopaedic knowledge of misericords. Her monumental *Corpus of Medieval Misericords* volumes will no doubt inform medieval scholars for generations to come, and those included in the present collection are both proud and grateful to be of the first generation to benefit from her work on this body of

carvings which challengingly — and playfully — straddles the sometimes invisible line between the sacred and the profane.

It is appropriate in the context of a celebration of such a prolific scholar that this volume should open with Frédéric Billiet's account of one of the final direct beneficiaries of Elaine's expertise. Adventurous and intellectually acute to the end of her life, Elaine visited Moscow in 2007 to advise on the provenance of a set of choir stalls in the Pushkin Museum — a trip which would have daunted any number of younger and fitter scholars. Such, however, was Elaine's passion for her subject — a passion by which it was impossible to be untouched.

L'ORIGINE DES STALLES DU MUSÉE POUCHKINE DE MOSCOU: LA DERNIÈRE EXPERTISE D'ELAINE BLOCK

Frédéric Billiet

Les stalles conservées au Musée Pouchkine de Moscou sont présentées au public par un cartel qui ne précise pas leur provenance.¹ Il est indiqué qu'il s'agit d'un mobilier français daté du XVI^e siècle:

Stalle de choeur France (?), XVI (?). Chêne.²

D'où proviennent ces stalles? Cette question a souvent été posée à Elaine Block devenue la spécialiste des stalles médiévales pour lesquelles elle a consacré la plus grande partie de sa vie. Il lui aura fallu quarante années pour visiter des milliers d'églises européennes, sans compter les musées, afin de réaliser un inventaire exhaustif des miséricordes qui témoignent de l'art des tailleurs d'images au Moyen Âge.³

Pour traiter de la provenance de ces stalles, il est donc nécessaire de faire un détour afin de présenter l'originale démarche d'Elaine Block.

A l'origine de ses recherches sur les miséricordes, il s'agissait pour elle de montrer à ses étudiants en histoire de l'art dans la célèbre City University of New

¹ Je remercie Anastasie Selivanova qui a eu l'obligeance de m'accompagner au Musée Pouchkine de Moscou et de traduire les documents. Toutes les photographies de l'article ont été prises par Frédéric Billiet.

² D'après nos renseignements les objets de cette salle auraient été achetés par Tsvetaev, le fondateur du Musée Pouchkine.

³ Cet inventaire est en cours de publication aux éditions Brepols sous le titre *Corpus of Medieval Misericords*. Sont déjà parus le volume *France* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003) et le volume *Iberia* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005).

York la complexité de cette période et l'imaginaire débordant du monde médiéval.⁴ Sur les miséricordes sont représentées des scènes aussi diverses que les instants de la vie quotidienne, les hommes au travail, l'illustration des textes bibliques, des fabliaux et des proverbes, les images du 'monde à l'envers', les animaux fantastiques, et des motifs décoratifs. Pour les étudiants, Elaine Block photographie patiemment des centaines de miséricordes et rassemble les images par thèmes dans des films qui mériteraient d'être mieux connus.⁵ C'est une véritable découverte pour le public américain car il n'y avait pas, à cette époque, d'études sérieuses sur ce mobilier sculpté encore considéré comme un art mineur. Elaine Block décide alors de rendre justice à ces artisans talentueux et à leurs commanditaires en consacrant tout son temps et son argent à répertorier les miséricordes.⁶ Elle prend donc sa retraite de professeur à Hunter College, achète un appartement à Paris, et parcourt des milliers de kilomètres dans toute l'Europe avec sa Renault 5 bleue. Il n'y a pas un responsable de paroisse dotée de stalles qui ne se souvienne de 'cette dame aux cheveux blancs qui venait spécialement de New York pour photographier ce mobilier quasiment inconnu des habitants'. Aucun chapelain, aucun adjoint au maire n'osait lui refuser l'ouverture d'une église désaffectée.⁷ Alors que j'ai souvent regretté qu'on ne m'autorise pas l'accès aux stalles, j'ai pu constater qu'Elaine Block les avait photographiées avant moi sans problème! Rien ni personne ne pouvait l'arrêter. Sauf le père abbé de l'Abbaye de Solesmes qui, se rendant compte que le Professeur 'E. C. Block' était une femme, ne lui a pas donné la possibilité de pénétrer dans l'espace réservé aux moines. Ce n'est que quelques années plus tard, que j'ai réussi à convaincre les moines — que je connaissais du fait de mes études sur le chant grégorien — de la nécessité de faire étudier leurs stalles par une spécialiste. C'est avec une immense joie qu'Elaine Block est entrée dans le cœur, momentanément déserté par les moines. Ainsi, les stalles de l'abbaye de Solesmes figurent-elles

⁴ Hunter College (CUNY).

⁵ Films en vidéo sur les travaux liés aux saisons, les proverbes et les animaux sculptés dans les stalles médiévales. Misericordia International publications website: <<http://www.leedstrinity.ac.uk/departments/english/misericordia/Pages/default.aspx>>.

⁶ Durant cette période ont été publiés les ouvrages de Dorothee Kraus et Henry Kraus dont un inventaire non-exhaustif des stalles de France, *The Hidden World of Misericords* (New York: George Braziller, 1975) et d'Espagne, *The Gothic Choirstalls of Spain* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986).

⁷ En France, les clés des églises désaffectées sont souvent conservées dans les mairies ou confiées à un habitant du village.

dans le corpus des miséricordes françaises.⁸ Elle a pu ainsi accumuler des milliers de diapositives et une large bibliographie sur l'iconographie médiévale. Elle pouvait alors partager ses connaissances dans des colloques internationaux où renardiens,⁹ spécialistes des danses macabres et historiens des arts décoratifs ont pu l'entendre et l'apprécier.¹⁰ C'est au colloque de Conques que j'ai rencontré Elaine Block pour la première fois. Je travaillais sur le concept de vie musicale au Moyen Âge associant les documents d'archives municipales et l'iconographie musicale disponible. Dans cette perspective d'études, les stalles constituent un corpus d'images intéressant lorsque l'ensemble est resté dans son lieu d'origine. J'avais donc photographié les stalles de la cathédrale d'Amiens (1508–28) pour aborder tous les aspects de la vie musicale de cette ville au XVI^e siècle.¹¹ Impressionné par le nombre de scènes musicales dans cet ensemble j'ai publié un ouvrage intitulé *Concert imaginaire dans les stalles de la cathédrale d'Amiens*.¹² Lorsque j'ai été présenté à Elaine Block à Conques, elle me dit immédiatement: 'J'ai votre livre sur les stalles médiévales d'Amiens à New-York. J'ai besoin de vous pour identifier les instruments de musique dans les stalles.' Par ses relations, elle parvenait à acquérir toutes les publications sur les stalles. Entre-temps, elle avait créé l'association Misericordia International pour rassembler les passionnés, organiser des colloques, et publier une revue consacrée à ce sujet: *Arts profanes/Profane Arts*.¹³ Elle a aussi constitué un groupe d'auteurs qui s'est réuni chez Sylvie Bethmont à Moret-sur-Loing pour mettre au point un lexique des supports iconographiques dans les stalles afin de

⁸ Block, *Corpus of Medieval Misericords: France*.

⁹ La Société *Renardus* est un groupe international de chercheurs en études médiévales qui a toujours accueilli les recherches d'Elaine Block dans les colloques et publié ses articles dans la revue *Renardus*.

¹⁰ Parmi les nombreux historiens de l'art il faut citer Michael Camille qui, peu avant sa mort, est venu visiter les stalles de Saint-Martin-aux-Bois tant il aimait comparer les scènes dessinées dans les marges des manuscrits avec les représentations iconographiques dans les stalles médiévales.

¹¹ Frédéric Billiet, *La Vie musicale à Amiens au XVI^e siècle* (Amiens: CRDP, 1981).

¹² Frédéric Billiet et Gilbert Lefeuve, *Concert imaginaire dans les stalles de la cathédrale d'Amiens* (Amiens: Courrier Picard, 1982).

¹³ Huit colloques internationaux ont été organisés sous la présidence d'Elaine Block. Le dernier a eu lieu en septembre 2006 à Bâle ('La Nature, rythme et danse des saisons dans les stalles médiévales'). En juin 2008 s'est tenu en Sorbonne le colloque de Paris sur le thème du charivari. Voir la liste des numéros publiés dans la revue *Arts profanes/Profane Arts* sur le site Misericordia International.

faciliter la communication entre les chercheurs.¹⁴ Pour toutes ces données, pour sa formidable connaissance des ensembles et la constitution d'une incomparable bibliothèque,¹⁵ Elaine Block était régulièrement interrogée par des étudiants avides de renseignements précis sur les ensembles qu'ils étudiaient.

Revenons maintenant aux stalles du Musée Pouchkine. A mon retour de Moscou, j'ai donc posé la question de la provenance des stalles du Musée Pouchkine. Il me paraissait évident que ces stalles ne provenaient pas des pays de l'Est puisque le voyage en Pologne effectué avec Elaine Block avait permis de vérifier qu'à partir de ce pays, les abattants de stalles deviennent fixes.¹⁶ Nous avons parcouru 1500 kilomètres et visité plus de vingt ensembles magnifiques pour ne trouver que six miséricordes dont quatre dataient du XIX^e siècle! Les stalles du Musée Pouchkine avec leurs abattants mobiles provenaient donc d'une autre région. A Moscou, j'avais soigneusement photographié l'ensemble dans tous les détails selon une procédure bien rôdée par Elaine Block. La mémoire de notre collègue lui faisait rarement défaut — elle était capable d'identifier une miséricorde à partir d'une simple photo — et quelques détails pouvaient l'aider à confirmer ses premières impressions suggérées par le style du sculpteur. A cet effet, elle photographiait la forme des sellettes,¹⁷ le décor du chant des parcloises, les frises d'accoudoirs et tant d'autres détails qui permettent de retrouver des parties d'ensembles français dispersés après la Révolution. Elle a ainsi pu identifier un ensemble conservé au Metropolitan Museum de New York et bien d'autres parties d'ensembles conservés dans de petites communes comme celles de Precy-Saint-Martin. Je me souviens qu'en rendant les clés au maire du village, Elaine Block lui a indiqué que les trois stalles conservées dans l'église proviennent d'une abbaye non identifiée et qu'une autre partie se trouvait dans l'église du village voisin à Ramerupt. D'abord le maire s'emporta comme un propriétaire craignant que cette découverte ne l'oblige un jour à rendre le mobilier à la commune voisine pour rassembler les éléments d'un même ensemble puis il nous promit de prendre soin des stalles et de les restaurer. Heureusement, les premières réactions sont moins violentes chez les conservateurs

¹⁴ GIRS: Groupe international de recherche sur les stalles. *Lexique des stalles médiévales*, dir. par Elaine Block et Frédéric Billiet, en cours de publication aux éditions Brepols.

¹⁵ Ce fonds, partagé entre sa maison de New York et son appartement parisien, sera classé et mis à la disposition des chercheurs avec le soutien de l'association Misericordia International.

¹⁶ C'est probablement sous l'influence du culte orthodoxe.

¹⁷ Voir le lexique à paraître chez Brepols ou le schéma sur le site Musicastallis, <<http://www.plm.paris-sorbonne.fr/musicastallis/>>.

de musée toujours à l'affût de renseignements sur les objets qui font l'originalité de leurs collections.

Pour trouver les stalles présentées dans le Musée Pouchkine et pouvoir les photographier, j'avais suivi les indications d'Elaine Block qui les avait vues dans les années 1970 dans la grande salle gothique derrière un piano à queue noir. Il n'est jamais évident de retrouver, trente ans après, les objets à la même place dans un musée sachant qu'un conservateur peut décider de les mettre en réserve ou de les déplacer.¹⁸ Parfois même, le musée peut être définitivement fermé. C'est le cas par exemple du musée d'Asti en Italie, où l'ensemble conservé dans une très belle salle du palais a retrouvé la lumière sous les flashes des appareils d'Elaine qui avait obtenu la permission de pénétrer dans ce lieu interdit aux visiteurs. Mais au Musée Pouchkine de Moscou, trente ans après, les stalles étaient toujours à la même place, derrière le piano à queue laqué noir.

Il s'agissait donc de photographier des éléments caractéristiques des quatre stalles du Musée. L'opération n'est pas toujours facile et peut amener des péripéties dont je ne résiste pas à en relater quelques unes en mémoire de notre collègue, héroïne de toutes ces aventures. Pour photographier dans les stalles, il faut souvent obtenir des autorisations et, le cas échéant, se contenter de photographier sans flash des sculptures monochromes de teinte foncée.¹⁹ La situation peut être rocambolesque quand, comme au Musée Gardner de Boston, le règlement vous interdit l'usage d'une lampe de poche pour discerner les personnages sur les miséricordes des stalles! Impossible de photographier. Elaine Block qui ne renonçait jamais a alors fait intervenir son amie Naomi Kline, professeur d'histoire de l'art à Plymouth University (New Hampshire), pour obtenir le droit d'éclairer et ainsi de photographier ces stalles très intéressantes. Pas de lumière non plus pour photographier les stalles de Zamora. Enfermés derrière les grilles du chœur, grâce à l'exceptionnelle autorisation d'une sœur, il nous a fallu demander aux touristes se hasardant de l'autre côté de la grille d'introduire des pièces dans un monnayeur pour une illumination de deux minutes à peine suffisantes pour la mise au point des objectifs. Avant chaque voyage d'étude, il fallait écrire et demander des permissions puis trouver la personne et le moyen d'entrer pour photographier. Rares sont les

¹⁸ Le musée historique de Bâle (Historisches Museum, Basel) conserve dans ses réserves les miséricordes originales des stalles de la Cathédrale. Ces objets ont été présentés lors du colloque *Misericordia International*, 'La Nature, rythme et danse des saisons dans les stalles médiévales' (septembre 2006) en présence des artisans qui effectuent les moulages.

¹⁹ Au Moyen Âge, certaines miséricordes étaient peintes comme l'ensemble de la statuaire dans les églises. Voir les miséricordes polychromes conservées au musée des antiquités de Rouen (France).

curés ou les responsables qui répondaient mais le plus souvent le gardien informé malgré tout nous attendait avec les clés ou débranchait préalablement l'alarme pour nous éviter les ennuis. Dans l'église de Caen, personne ne nous attendait mais un passage avait été aménagé dans la rangée de chaises censée interdire l'accès aux stalles. A Rouen, c'est un ancien élève de la maîtrise qui nous a fait pénétrer dans l'ensemble placé derrière l'actuel maître-autel pour que nous puissions photographier les stalles qu'il occupait dans sa jeunesse.²⁰ A la Cathédrale d'Amiens, c'est l'incontournable sacristain Jean Macrez qui détient les clés de la grille d'accès au chœur et permet d'y accéder.²¹ Dans les églises fermées au culte et aux visiteurs, il fallait interroger les voisins ou les commerçant de proximité pour trouver le détenteur des clefs.²²

Pourtant, ces photographies sont des témoignages indispensables compte-tenu de la fragilité de ces mobiliers parfois conservés dans des conditions précaires. Elaine Block a ainsi proposé ses photographies pour la reconstruction des stalles de Saint-Claude après l'incendie de septembre 1983. Elle a fait de même après la chute d'un clocheton de seize tonnes dans le chœur de cathédrale de Rouen lors de la tempête de décembre 1999 et a ainsi participé à une restauration de grande qualité. En Europe, c'est en Espagne que les permissions pour photographier sont les plus difficiles à obtenir. L'évêché de Tolède demande un prix tellement exorbitant par photographie que les chercheurs préfèrent renoncer. A Oviedo, le gardien avait donné l'autorisation de photographier les stalles quand une interdiction venue d'on ne sait où nous a contraint d'interrompre le travail.²³ Les plus rapides d'entre nous ont pu partager les quelques images déjà prises avec ceux qui avaient commencé par contempler l'ensemble. A partir de cette péripétie, en entrant dans les chœurs, Elaine Block démarrait immédiatement le 'mitrillage' des stalles avec des appareils toujours plus sophistiqués.²⁴

²⁰ Un ouvrage sur les stalles de Rouen a été publié aux Presses de l'université de Rouen: *Les Stalles de la cathédrale de Rouen* (Rouen: PUR, 2005).

²¹ Lire: Billiet et Lefeuve, *Concert imaginaire dans les stalles de la Cathédrale d'Amiens*, et le récent ouvrage de Kristiane Lemé, *Les Stalles de Notre-Dame d'Amiens* (Paris: Picard, 2007).

²² A Saint-Martin-aux-Bois, la clé de l'abbatiale est disponible au café d'en face.

²³ Un souvenir partagé avec Corinne Charles qui a publié de nombreux ouvrages sur le mobilier médiéval parmi lesquels il faut citer *Stalles sculptées du XV^e siècle: Genève et le duché de Savoie* (Paris: Picard, 1999).

²⁴ L'étudiant Bastien Sherbeck a ainsi photographié systématiquement toutes les stalles des ensembles anglais du Yorkshire visités en compagnie d'Elaine Block en 2006. Beaucoup d'autres souvenirs pourraient être évoqués ici.

A Moscou, en novembre 2007, il était possible de photographier les objets sans flash. Le meuble présenté se compose de quatre sièges avec abatant et miséricorde, cinq parcloses sans jouées terminales. Il n'y a pas non plus de dorsaux mais il n'est pas établi que cette partie du mobilier ait été prévue pour ces stalles.



Figure 1. Sellette de la première miséricorde (M1), Moscou, Musée Pouchkine de Moscou.

Au premier regard toutes les stalles se ressemblent et il n'est pas toujours aisé de distinguer

les caractéristiques stylistiques permettant d'identifier tel ou tel groupe d'artisans.²⁵ Selon Elaine Block, il est essentiel de photographier quatre éléments essentiels qui permettront de discerner des identités: la forme des sellettes, des miséricordes et des museaux; le profil des parcloses avec les moulures.

Les miséricordes des stalles du Musée Pouchkine sont taillées dans la masse. Les sellettes hémisphériques sont contournées par un tore à profil outrepassé qui forme aussi la transition vers la miséricorde par une gorge et une scotie renversée (Figure 1).²⁶ Le cône qui soutient la sellette se termine par une petite console (Figure 2) ressemblant ainsi à la forme d'une cloche renversée (voir Figure 7). Dans cet espace limité les personnages sont placés comme sur une scène.

²⁵ Il est aisé de distinguer les périodes de construction des stalles (médiévale ou Renaissance) ou des caractéristiques régionales. Les stalles anglaises par exemple présentent des miséricordes avec des tenants à gauche et à droite de la scène principale, et des 'poppies' en ronde-bosse sur les couronnements de jouée. Certaines rangées de stalles basses espagnoles sont surmontées d'un dorsal incliné qui peut faire office de pupitre pour les moines occupant les stalles hautes. En revanche, le style des sculpteurs et les thèmes iconographiques ne permettent pas de certifier la provenance de l'ensemble dans la mesure où les artisans se déplaçaient dans toute l'Europe. Par exemple, des ensembles espagnols ont été réalisés par des huchiers flamands.

²⁶ Les sellettes peuvent être de formes très différentes. Il y a trois formes génériques: une forme à devant droit; une forme arrondie; une forme pointue. Je remercie Welleda Müller, doctorante à l'Université de Bourgogne pour la vérification terminologique.



Figure 2. Détail de la miséricorde (M1), Moscou, Musée Pouchkine de Moscou.

Le chant des parcloses est ouvragé. De la base jusqu'à l'arrêt de l'abattant, une colonnette monocylindrique est légèrement engagée. Son profil en façade forme une arête adoucie par une 'fausse languette'. Le tailloir du chapiteau est orné de motifs végétaux.²⁷ De chaque côté du chant supérieur des parcloses ont été ajoutées de fines rainures parallèlement à la moulure centrale. Cet ensemble décoratif est reproduit entre l'appui-main et l'accoudoir.²⁸ Entre les deux court une moulure curviligne qui prolonge la colonnette (Figure 3). Ce type de profil de parclose est assez courant dans les ensembles français

du XVI^e siècle et correspond au dessin proposé par Eugène Viollet-le-Duc dans son article sur les stalles médiévales (Figure 4).²⁹ Ce sont les moulures qui font la différence.

Les museaux hémisphériques sont bordés par une moulure sculptée en gorges à profil demi-circulaire, et d'une doucine d'accoudoir qui se fond dans l'accotoir (Figure 5). En plus de ces détails qui permettent de mieux identifier les ensembles, il faut souligner la décoration des sous-dossiers avec fenestrage flamboyant chaque fois différent.³⁰ Cette décoration n'est pas fréquente dans les ensembles de stalles.³¹

Les éléments observés forment les caractéristiques qui permettront de comparer ces stalles avec d'autres qui pourraient appartenir au même ensemble. Car les quatre stalles du Musée Pouchkine de Moscou sont une partie d'un ensemble plus important comme le prouvent l'absence de jouées terminales et l'arrangement des deux extrémités avec une variante de retroussis et une tablette en encoignure pour améliorer la présentation du groupe amputé (Figure 6). De plus, la parclose

²⁷ Claude Bouzin, *Dictionnaire du meuble* (Paris: Massin, 2000).

²⁸ Un tailloir lisse est ajouté entre le rinceau et la frise de museau.

²⁹ Eugène Viollet-le-Duc, *Dictionnaire de l'architecture médiévale* (Sprimont: Pierre Mardaga, 1995), p. 470.

³⁰ Aurélia et Anne Lovreglio, *Dictionnaire des mobiliers et des objets d'art du Moyen Âge au XIX^e siècle* (Paris: Le Robert, 2006).

³¹ Cette décoration de sous-dossier assez rare dans les ensembles français est particulièrement ouvragée dans les stalles de Gaillon conservées à la basilique Saint-Denis.



Figure 3. Profil de parclose, Moscou, Musée Pouchkine de Moscou.

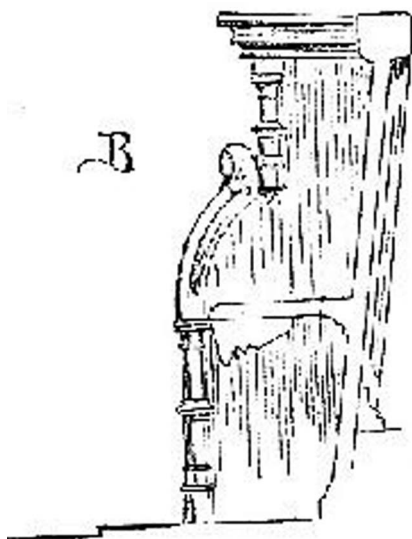


Figure 4. Dessin de 'profil des stalles basses' par Viollet-le-Duc.



Figure 5. Moulures de museau, Moscou, Musée Pouchkine de Moscou.



Figure 6. Parcloses terminale réaménagée, Moscou, Musée Pouchkine de Moscou.

terminale garde la trace de la rainure qui devait faciliter le pivotement de l'abattant de la stalle suivante lorsque l'ensemble était complet.

A la question 'd'où proviennent les stalles de Moscou?' et après une observation des détails photographiés, Elaine Block a tout de suite répondu: 'Bordeaux'. Nous avons alors consulté les photographies de l'ensemble des trente-deux stalles conservées dans l'église Saint-Seurin de Bordeaux.

La comparaison des photographies ne laisse pas de place au doute. Il y a une parfaite ressemblance entre les stalles de Bordeaux et celles de Moscou tant pour les

sellettes que pour les moulures. Dans les deux cas, le bois utilisé est le chêne. Les deux photographies ci-dessous montrent que la forme de la sellette en demi-lune (33x53x19) est la même dans les stalles de Moscou et dans celles de Bordeaux. Cette forme en 'demi-lune élongée est unique'.³² Le boudin et les moulures sont identiques.

La structure des miséricordes de ces stalles est caractéristique avec l'emploi de cette petite console inférieure repérée dans le corpus d'Elaine Block: 'Console: concave, rounded, narrow, some end with small platform'.³³ Cette structure des miséricordes en forme de cloche renversée est parfaitement visible entre les deux

³² Block, *Corpus of Medieval Misericords: France*, p. 64.

³³ Block, *Corpus of Medieval Misericords: France*, p. 64.



Figure 7. Miséricorde des joueurs de fifre et de tambour, Bordeaux, Saint-Seurin de Bordeaux.

musiciens représentés dans les stalles de Bordeaux (Figure 7). Elle est parfois dissimulée derrière le décor des autres miséricordes mais la petite console apparaît clairement sur la première scène des stalles de Moscou (Figure 8).

Il est facile de remarquer que les parties décoratives des chants de ces parcloses sont rigoureusement identiques. Depuis les appuis-main jusqu'aux accoudoirs, se trouvent la même colonnette avec une base octogonale et des moulures semblables. On note aussi sur la photographie la présence d'une fausse languette sur le fût de la colonnette (que ce soit sur le chant curviligne (Figure 9) ou sur le chant vertical des parcloses).

Il s'agit donc d'un même ensemble qui a été démantelé et dont nous avons retrouvé une partie à Bordeaux, une autre partie au Musée Pouchkine de Moscou et une autre partie dans l'église Saint-Martin de l'Isle-Adam (Val d'Oise). En effet, le corpus d'Elaine Block signale la vente de stalles à l'Isle-Adam: 'Original set of stalls was much longer. Some were sold to l'Isle-Adam. Notice of acquisition of choir stalls on back of south stalls in church. l'Isle-Adam: 10 stalles.'³⁴

Sculptées au XVI^e siècle sous la direction d'un maître d'œuvre dont le nom reste encore inconnu, ces stalles témoignent d'une influence flamande (style et thèmes).

³⁴ Block, *Corpus of Medieval Misericords: France*, p. 177.



Figure 8 (ci-dessus). Miséricorde 'L'aigle nourrit ses petits' (M2), Moscou, Musée Pouchkine de Moscou.

Figure 9 (ci-contre). Appui-main 'Homme vêtu d'un chaperon' (AM 3-4), Moscou, Musée Pouchkine de Moscou.



Les huchiers flamands, très réputés à cette époque, voyageaient au gré des commandes vers le sud de la France et jusqu'en Espagne. Les miséricordes des stalles de Bordeaux et de l'Isle-Adam sont parfaitement décrites dans le *Corpus of Medieval Misericords: France*.³⁵ Les thèmes iconographiques des miséricordes s'entremêlent: le monde à l'envers, les proverbes, les scènes mythologiques (sirènes, griffons) alternent avec les scènes de la vie quotidienne avec une prédilection pour les jeux.

Pour les recherches en iconographie musicale menées par l'équipe de recherche Patrimoines et langages musicaux de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, il faut aussi signaler une belle représentation du joueur de fifre accompagné par le joueur de tambour (Figure 7). Mais on signalera également un joueur de cornemuse en appui-main et des cochons jouant de l'orgue. Ici, contrairement à la scène sculptée dans l'ensemble du XVI^e siècle conservé au Musée de Cluny à Paris (Figure 10), c'est la truie qui pose les pieds sur le clavier de l'orgue positif tandis que le mâle actionne les soufflets. Le huchier a laissé visible entre les pieds de la table qui supporte l'orgue, la petite console de structure de la miséricorde qui caractérise l'ensemble identifié.

Dans les stalles du Musée Pouchkine de Moscou sont conservées quatre miséricordes. De gauche à droite on peut observer les scènes suivantes:

³⁵ Block, *Corpus of Medieval Misericords: France*, p. 177.



Figure 10. Cochons à l'orgue, Paris, Musée National du Moyen Âge de Paris.



Figure 11. Aigle (M1), Moscou, Musée Pouchkine de Moscou.



Figure 12. Nid (M2), Moscou, Musée Pouchkine de Moscou.

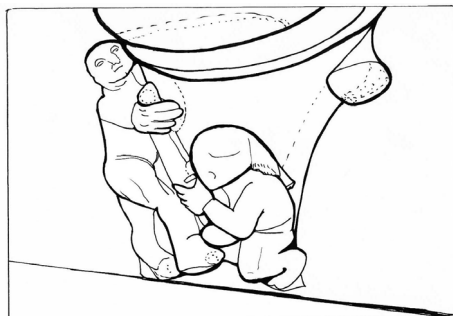


Figure 13. Combat (M3), Moscou, Musée Pouchkine de Moscou. Dessin par Sylvie Bethmont.

- 1) Un aigle enserre et dévore un rat. Une feuille de chêne et des glands figurent en arrière plan (Figure 11).
- 2) Un oiseau semble nourrir ses trois petits dans un nid d'osier (Figure 12).
- 3) Lutte entre deux personnages nus accrochés au même bâton ou à une corde qui rejoindrait la partie mutilée sous la sellette (Figure 13).
- 4) Feuillage.

A Bordeaux, les appuis-main sont des sculptures en ronde-bosse, représentant des personnages divers. On remarque aussi des moines et des animaux dans les stalles de l'Isle-Adam. Comme dans les autres ensembles, les personnages du groupe de Moscou enfourchent la moulure. De gauche à droite:

AM 1) Personnage vêtu d'une aube penchant la tête sur sa gauche avec les bras pendants (Figure 14).

AM 1-2) Personnage vêtu d'une aube, coiffé d'un bonnet à mentonnière (probablement une nonne) les mains jointes, en posture de prière (Figure 15).

AM 2-3) Chimère ou dragon se léchant le flanc gauche (Figure 16).

AM 3-4) Personnage vêtu d'un chaperon. Les mains mutilées étaient probablement jointes (voir Figure 9).

AM 5) Personnage vêtu d'une aube, bras mutilés, bouche fermée (Figure 17).

Dans l'état actuel des connaissances, il n'est pas possible de déceler un thème iconographique général dans cet ensemble réparti sur trois lieux. Les miséricordes des quatre stalles de Moscou sont très hétéroclites: deux miséricordes mettent en scènes des volatiles, une miséricorde présente un feuillage stylisé, une autre deux personnages nus. Ces miséricordes s'inscrivent dans un type de représentation récurrent à Saint-Seurin de Bordeaux qui consiste à réunir deux personnages: deux hommes récoltant des fruits (NB-05), deux musiciens (SB-05), deux femmes devant un pupitre (SH-06), un homme pond des œufs face à une poule (SH-01), deux cochons jouent de l'orgue (NH-08). Il y a aussi: une scène de carnaval où deux hommes font la brouette (NB-01), deux hommes qui se battent (NB-07), et deux autres s'agrippant à un bâton dans le jeu de la pannoye (SH-05). Deux hommes frappent sur une marmite dans les stalles de l'Isle-Adam. Le combat ou le jeu des deux personnages nus des stalles de Moscou s'inscrit dans cette série.

S'il n'y a pas d'oiseaux représentés dans les stalles de Bordeaux, on peut y voir des animaux fantastiques comme les deux sirènes (SB-02) ou le griffon aux griffes acérées qui s'attaque à un chevalier en armure (SB-07). A Moscou, un aigle enserre un petit rat (M1) et une chimère en appui-main se lèche le flanc (AM 2-3).

Tous les éléments observés confirment donc l'appartenance des stalles de Moscou à un ensemble plus important dont une partie est installée à Saint-Seurin de Bordeaux et une autre à l'église Saint-Martin de l'Isle-Adam. La forme et la structure des miséricordes, les éléments décoratifs, et les sujets iconographiques traités sont identiques comme l'avait dit du premier coup d'œil notre amie Elaine Block à qui cet article est dédié.



Figure 14. Personnage vêtu d'une aube (AM 1), Moscou, Musée Pouchkine de Moscou. Dessin par Sylvie Bethmont.



Figure 15. Prière (AM 1-2), Moscou, Musée Pouchkine de Moscou.



Figure 16. Chimère (AM 2-3), Moscou, Musée Pouchkine de Moscou.



Figure 17. Homme en aube (AM 5), Moscou, Musée Pouchkine de Moscou.

PLAYING GAMES IN THE EARLY FRENCH THEATRE (1350–1550)

Alan Hindley

The relationship between ‘game’ and drama, between ‘play’ and ‘plays’, has long been understood as one of the accepted theories of the development of medieval theatre, according an important place to the influence of folk elements. Such a paradigm stands in distinct contrast to the approach of critics such as Karl Young, for example, for whom it was the liturgy of the medieval church that was of prime importance. Not that the early theatre fell into either one or the other category since, as recent work has demonstrated, the spectrum of medieval theatrical expression is considerably more diverse than was once thought.¹ And as Bakhtin has shown us, medieval life, far from being uniformly sombre, was intensely ludic, filled with play, games, sports, and para-dramatics of all kinds.² We have only to peruse Chambers’s volume on ‘Folk Drama’, with its chapters on New Year festivities, the May Game, the Sword Dance, together with other aspects of the Europe-wide ‘*ludi* of the folk’, to appreciate the slipperiness of the term ‘play’.³ Lawrence M. Clopper’s study of *Drama, Play, and Game*, for instance, points out that the term ‘*ludus*/play’ may often designate all manner of games and sports of the types discussed by Chambers and is certainly not restricted to a ‘play’ in the sense of a dramatic enactment.⁴ The comparable terminology in French also

¹ See for example, *Between Folk and Liturgy*, ed. by Alan J. Fletcher and Wim Hüskén (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997).

² Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. by Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

³ E. K. Chambers, *The Medieval Stage*, 2 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1903), I, 90.

⁴ Lawrence M. Clopper, *Drama, Play, and Game: English Festive Culture in the Medieval and Early Modern Period* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 12.

reminds us that the term *jeu* ('game', 'play') can often also designate 'gaming', where social activities such as board-games, dice, and cards came to be exploited not just as a means of injecting an element of realism into the action but also as an important source of symbolic and metaphorical significance. Such a distinction did not, however, prevent dramatists from incorporating 'play' in the broad festive sense into their dramas, which they sometimes did for a variety of reasons aesthetic, didactic, or satirical. In this paper I shall examine some of these game motifs in a selection of plays from the substantial corpus of late medieval French play texts, both religious and secular, of the period 1350–1550. That this period broadly corresponds to an upsurge of interest in aspects of game culture in other media — Rabelais's famous list in chapter XXII of *Gargantua* (1534),⁵ for instance, or Pieter Brueghel's painting of *Children's Games* (1560)⁶ — is not coincidental. Indeed the phenomenon may well suggest that there are parallels to be drawn with the 'playfulness' of certain themes depicted on misericords — that important cultural medium which the indefatigable Elaine Block did so much to unearth and elucidate.

Mystère

Véronique Dominguez's recent monograph, *La Scène et la Croix*, effectively demonstrates the centrality of Christ's suffering and death at the hands of his torturers in the redemptive process dramatized in the late medieval passion plays.⁷ That a popular game came to be used in the 'buffeting' of Christ episodes of the passion narrative is perhaps surprising, yet it features in a number of European traditions. In France it appears, albeit briefly, in the early *Passion du Palatinus* (c. 1300) but is more elaborately treated in the mid-fourteenth-century *Passion Sainte-Geneviève*,⁸ and particularly in the full-scale passion narratives of Arnoul

⁵ Rabelais, 'Les jeux de Gargantua', *Gargantua*, in *Œuvres de François Rabelais*, ed. by Abel Lefranc (Paris: Champion, 1913), I, Bk I, chap. XXII, pp. 188–214.

⁶ See Sandra Hindman, 'Pieter Bruegel's Children's Games, Folly, and Chance', *Art Bulletin*, 63 (1981), 447–75.

⁷ Véronique Dominguez, *La Scène et la Croix: le jeu de l'acteur dans les passions dramatiques françaises (XIV^e–XVI^e siècles)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), pp. 82–106.

⁸ *Le Mystère de la Passion Nostre Seigneur du manuscrit 1131 de la Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève*, ed. by Graham A. Runnalls (Geneva: Droz, 1974).

Gréban and Jean Michel.⁹ The game in question is attested under a variety of names: in French most commonly *Que fery?* or *Chappefol*, a game that has some aspects in common with *colin-maillard*, a sort of blind man's buff. Lillian Randall, discussing marginal images in an early fourteenth-century Book of Hours, draws parallels with the English 'Frog in the Middle' (*La Grenouille*) and the related game of 'Hot Cockles' (Froissart, in *L'Espinette amoureuse*, line 218, refers to this as *kokilles*), in all of which the standard motifs include blows to the head, reviling by spitting, and the challenging of Christ to identify his tormentors.¹⁰

The episodes in question are sanctioned by the biblical passion story itself: 'Now the men who were holding Jesus mocked him and beat him; they also blindfolded him and asked him, "Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?" And they spoke many other words against him, reviling him' (Luke 22. 63–65). This ritualizing of the tormenting of Christ by means of a game with set rules is found quite early on. The narrative *Livre de la Passion* (mid-thirteenth century), for example, elaborating on a brief passage in the *Passion des Jongleurs* (c. 1243), tells us that the tormentors play a game with Christ in which the winner receives a prize:

Au chappefol de lui [Jesus] jouoient;
En luy moquant se devoient;
Ce devant desriere li mistrent
Son chapperon; fort le ferirent;
Celli qui plus fort le frapoit,
Dez autres le pris emportoit.
Moult li firent de villonnie
Et disoient par moquerie:
'Prophetise qui t'a feru!
Toute la nuit, tant que jour fu
Demenerent de Dieu leur gas. (lines 749–59)¹¹

In the *Palatinus* a stage-direction (lines 395–96) suggests comparable game activity in which the tormentors in turn strike Christ to the refrain, 'Qui t'a feru? Or le devine' (line 397); whilst a parallel episode in the fifteenth-century *Passion de Semur* uses the specific term 'Chappil fol' (line 6433) in association with similar

⁹ *Le Mystère de la Passion d'Arnoul Gréban*, ed. by Omer Jodogne, 2 vols (Brussels: Palais des Académies, 1965–83); *Jean Michel, Le Mystère de la Passion (Angers 1486)*, ed. by Omer Jodogne (Gembloux: J. Duculot, 1959).

¹⁰ Lillian M. C. Randall, 'Games and the Passion in Pucelle's Hours of Jeanne d'Evreux', *Speculum*, 47 (1972), 246–57.

¹¹ *Le Livre de la Passion*, ed. by Grace Frank (Paris: Champion, 1930).

business.¹² It is in the *Passion Sainte-Geneviève*, however, that we find this game-motif more extensively elaborated. Here, in his interview with the High Priest Caiaphas (lines 1574–1679), Christ is manhandled and taunted by the two executioners, Marquin and Haquin, an episode in which he is spat at (line 1575), blindfolded (lines 1577–80), tied up (line 1581), and receives physical blows (lines 1582 *buffes*; 1592 *ay je le poing pesant?*). Lines 1594–1659 show the torturers formally questioning Christ in turn, each short speech punctuated with a variation on ‘Qui t’a feru? Car le me devine’ (lines 1596, 1603, 1607, 1611, 1622, 1640). Yet of the three persons involved, only two participate, for Christ remains silent throughout, refusing to take part in the cruel formality of the game. Later (lines 1954–93), Herod will instruct the tormentors to dress Jesus in the white gown of the fool: ‘Mais ainçois que parties de cy, | Ceste grant robe blanche cy | En guise de folly vestez, | Et ceste aumuce ly metez.’ This transformation of Jesus into a kind of game figure is even more explicit in the Gréban-Michel narrative, where he is first dressed in white and referred to as ‘roi des cornars’ (Gréban, line 22,849), then forced to wear ‘un abit de roy [...] le plus villement qu’on pourra [...] ung vieulx pourpre tout troué’ (lines 22,859–60). In Michel he is mocked by the soldiers as ‘roy des couars’ and ‘roy des malheureux’ (lines 24,937, 25,033) as if he were a king in some festive game.¹³ As Kolve remarks in his analysis of similar scenes in the Towneley Play, the aesthetic and emotional effect is considerable, a means of extending a passage of the gospel in which Christ is a passive figure, whilst providing a new way for us to look at those who kill him, and yet who deserve his forgiveness, ‘for they know not what they do’ (Luke 23. 34; cf. *La Passion d’Auvergne*, lines 2983–90). If Christ is depicted here as the humiliated loser, it is because his tormentors have failed to see that he is involved — just as they are — in a divine game in which the salvation story will ultimately reveal him as the true victor.¹⁴ Such game activities should certainly not be dismissed, then, as a crude

¹² See *La Passion du Palatinus*, ed. by Grace Frank (Paris: Champion, 1922). The preceding stage-direction here suggests a succession of blows, as in *La Passion de Semur*, ed. by P. T. Durbin and Lynette Muir (Leeds: University of Leeds Centre for Medieval Studies, 1981), where we read: ‘OMNES JUDEI unus post alium: Or devine qui t’a feru’ (line 6439).

¹³ See Sandra Billington, *Midsummer: A Cultural Sub-Text from Chrétien de Troyes to Jean Michel* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), pp. 184–85.

¹⁴ Cf. V. A. Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), pp. 178–80.

reflection of 'medieval' sadism, but seen rather as part of a conscious *amplificatio* designed to convey the deeper meaning of the crucifixion.¹⁵

Following on from the buffeting motif, we see the incorporation of a different kind of game in episodes in which Christ's garments are disposed of in scenes of gambling with dice. Like the torture scenes discussed above, these were also the subject of the visual arts. Mehl, for instance, reproduces a fourteenth-century French missal miniature executed for Pope Clement VII, depicting a seething mass of gamblers at the foot of the cross engaged in such worldly activities.¹⁶ Its dramatic parallel can be seen in the elaborate working out of Mark 15. 24 ('And they crucified him, and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide which each should take') that we also see in the *Passion d'Auvergne* of 1477.¹⁷ Here, a team of eight executioners gamble for various pieces of clothing in a sequence containing much detail of who wins what and the scores they achieve, until Malbec finally takes the prize by throwing the highest possible score with his three dice (lines 2525–2930). Such activities, together with wenching and carousing, come to figure man's propensity for sin, and as such are more extensively developed in the *moralité*. One thinks also of the tutorial offered by Gréban's Satan to the torturer who wonders what 'jeu de sort' they can use to gamble for Christ's seamless robe. What's this game called? asks their leader, Griffon, to which the Devil replies: 'Tu le dois appeler ung dé, | Qui est ung nom de grant haulteur.' Who invented it? 'Sans querir fable | Tu diras que ç'a fait le deable.' Indeed, part of the 'Tierce Journée' is punctuated with recurring episodes featuring a similar game of 'Que fery?' (lines 20,807–951), Christ's dressing up in a white robe to be mocked and humiliated as a 'king of fools' (line 22,853), leading up to Satan's detailed explanation to Griffon of the significance of the numbers on the dice. In the end Griffon throws a six and wins the robe (lines 25,717–19).

The contrast between the executioners' game in the Passion plays and the light-hearted pastoral games enjoyed by the shepherds of Adam de la Halle's *Jeu de Robin et Marion* (c. 1283) could not be more marked, and certainly helps us to appreciate the varied dramatic potential of games in different contexts. They also illustrate Huizinga's observation that the notion of play being only a pretend 'does not by

¹⁵ See Véronique Plesch, 'Étalage complaisant? The Torments of Christ in French Passion Plays', *Comparative Drama*, 28 (1994), 458–85.

¹⁶ Jean-Michel Mehl, *Les Jeux au royaume de France du XIII^e au début du XVI^e siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 1990), pl. 18.

¹⁷ *La Passion d'Auvergne*, ed. by Graham A. Runnalls (Geneva: Droz, 1982), lines 2667–2770.

any means prevent it from proceeding with the utmost seriousness'.¹⁸ This tension between 'play' and 'seriousness' is revealed in a very different pastoral scene in the *Sacrifice d'Abraham* section of the compilation that makes up the *Mistère du Vieil Testament* (mid-fifteenth century).¹⁹ A feature of this mystery cycle is the frequent parallels drawn between Old Testament stories and the events of the New Testament. Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac is thus presented as prefiguring Christ's Crucifixion. One of the ways the anonymous playwright portrays Isaac as a Christ-figure is to depict him as an innocent shepherd-boy involved in activities based on the tradition of the *bergerie*. At one point (lines 9550–67), Ismael invites his fellow 'bergiers', Isaac and Eliezir, to 'jouer a quelque jeu privé'. What will it be? 'La fossette', 'la tullerette', or 'la picque en Romme'? They plump for the latter since according to Eliezir, 'c'est un beau jeu'. It appears in Rabelais's list and probably denotes a game involving hitting a sharpened stick.²⁰ 'La fossette' (marbles) played by both children and adults is referred to by both Froissart and Rabelais.²¹ The sense of 'tullerette', however, is unclear: it could well refer to a game, though Craig thinks it may simply mean 'au flageolet', which suggests that following line 9567, the three shepherds play at 'picque en Romme' in full view of the audience, quite possibly with musical accompaniment. Some time later, sought out by Abraham to be led off to the slaughter, Isaac explains his absence: 'Mon pere, nous nous esbatons | A tous gieux plaisans et honnestes, | Icy en gardant noz moutons' (lines 9937–39). Such pastoral interludes, involving music and play, serve to vary the tone of the action, the children's innocent games providing a stark contrast to the agonizing choice that faces Abraham, and its significance for the salvation of mankind.

¹⁸ Johan Huizinga, *Homo ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1944; repr. 1980), pp. 8, 13.

¹⁹ See *The Evolution of a Mystery Play: A Critical Edition of Le Sacrifice d'Abraham of Le Mistère du Vieil Testament, La Moralité du Sacrifice d'Abraham, and the 1539 Version of Le Sacrifice d'Abraham of Le Mistère du Vieil Testament*, ed. by Barbara M. Craig (Orlando: French Literature Publications, 1983). The full text of the compilation is available in *Le Mistère du Vieil Testament*, ed. by le Baron James de Rothschild and E. Picot, 6 vols (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1878–91).

²⁰ According to Mehl, *Les Jeux*, p. 103: 'un jeu d'enfants consistant à ficher droit en terre un bâton pointu. On "envoie" à Rome celui dont le piquet est abattu par le piquet d'un autre joueur'.

²¹ See Mehl, *Les Jeux*, pp. 103–04; Froissart's list (from *L'Espinette amoureuse*), and that of Rabelais (from *Gargantua*, chap. XXII) are reproduced in *ibid.*, pp. 491–95.

Moralité

It is in the *moralités*, however, that we see the most sustained and varied treatment of such potentially transgressive activity as games and gaming. Their function here is different, since the *moralités* are essentially didactic plays, their allegorical personifications designed with the soteriological function of bringing men and women to salvation. The *Moralité du Sacrifice d'Abraham*, a reworking as a morality play of the Abraham and Isaac episode of the *Mistère du Vieil Testament* discussed above, demonstrates clearly this shift of perspective. Fragments of early printed editions dating from the early sixteenth century have enabled its modern editor to assemble the text of a *moralité* in which the games outlined in the pastoral episodes take on a distinctly moralizing tone that is absent from the mid-fifteenth-century original. Asked by Ysmael and Nachor to suggest something for them to play, Ysaac launches into a condemnation of various games, particularly those involving gambling, counseling instead the reading of improving texts:

Tous autres jeux sont inutiles,
s'il y a fausseté [o]u tort
depuis qu'on joue au jeu de sort,
cartes, dez ou a tel jourie —
ce sont tous jeux de piperie —
au jeu saint Marri ou aux quilles,
ne a la paulme, ne aux billes,
c'est mauvais jeu pour jeunes gens. (ed. by Craig, lines 211–18)

Though Ysaac does finally deign to play with his friends, many of their suggestions ('a la tablette', 'au festu', 'au vireton', 'au bel arc entre deux butes', lines 248–52) are dismissed, until the trio finally decide on 'un jeu de flustes' (line 253), which perhaps suggests that their 'playing' will be primarily musical, thus avoiding the moral perils of gambling.

Of course the popular appeal of gambling sequences is not new. They feature in a range of comico-realist texts, from the anonymous *Courtois d'Arras* and Jean Bodel's *Jeu de Saint Nicolas* to the narrative *fabliaux*, where we find many of the game motifs that will reappear in the *moralités*. Here, however, the stakes are higher; for not only is gambling depicted as a social and moral evil, it is also elaborated figuratively by means of the frequent allegories associated with the genre in terms of the wider struggle for the Christian's soul. Though much of the information assembled in Mehl's book derives from secular legal prohibitions, we should not forget that the Church regarded gambling as an infringement of the second Commandment, a *Contemptus Dei* against which Jean Gerson severely cautions his

flock.²² Indeed in the fictional universe of the morality play it is the tavern that serves as a focus for the sin of gaming, often in plays based on the parable of the Prodigal Son.²³ In the early sixteenth-century *L'Enfant prodigue*,²⁴ the parable is amplified by the addition of further characters: L'Enfant Gasté, L'Amy-de-Bonne-Foy, La Maquerelle and her two prostitutes Fin Cœur and La Gorrière. The tavern of *Courtois d'Arras* has thus become a brothel in which gambling also contributes to the prodigal's inevitable downfall and where various rounds of *glic* and *hazart* serve to ritualize the prodigal's fall into sin. In *Les Enfants de Maintenant* (early sixteenth century?),²⁵ the inn of the parable has been metamorphosed by the student playwright into the Devil's own schoolhouse. Moreover, we have here a dual-protagonist play in which the brothers Finet and Malduict follow contrasting paths to Damnation and Salvation respectively. Rejecting enrolment in the school of Instruction and Discipline, the brothers prefer the card-school of Jabien — 'fils de Malle Aventure'. Here they are encouraged by his daughter Luxure — 'cointe et jolie | Gracieuse et godinette' — to play a range of games: firstly *glic* (a kind of three-card brag); then at 'franc de carreau', a board game involving throwing a counter so that it lands within the lines of a square; and finally at 'marelles' (akin to 'merels' or 'nine men's morris').²⁶

Similar, and sometimes more elaborate, gambling sequences are found in the larger-scale morality plays,²⁷ where a more doctrinal logic seems to be in place; witness the greater emphasis on the Catholic sacraments of contrition, repentance,

²² They should follow Christ, whom they will certainly not find 'en la taverne, ni au jeu de dez' (cited by Mehl, *Les Jeux*, p. 321).

²³ Further analysis of these aspects of the morality plays can be found in my articles: 'L'Escole au deable: Tavern Scenes in the Old French *moralité*', *Comparative Drama*, 33 (1999–2000), 454–73; 'Wheeling and Dealing: Motifs of Fortune and Gambling in the Old French *Moralités*', *European Medieval Drama*, 5 (2001), 135–40 (pp. 143–48).

²⁴ *L'Enfant prodigue, moralita del sec. XVI*, ed. by Guiseppe Macri (Lecce: Adriatica Editrice Salentina, 1982).

²⁵ *Ancien théâtre français*, ed. by Anatole de Montaiglon and Eugène Viollot-Le-Duc, 10 vols (Paris: Jannet, 1854), III, 5–86.

²⁶ This sequence reminds us of the potential of games for metaphorical elaboration in an erotic sense: Cotgrave, for instance, glosses *glic* as 'to play fast and loose'; and *jouer de quilles* (see below) is similarly used by Rabelais, Marot, and Brantôme (see *Gargantua*, ed. by Lefranc, p. 202).

²⁷ *Bien Avisé Mal Avisé, L'Homme pecheur*, and Simon Bougouin's *L'Homme juste et L'Homme mondain*, of which photo-facsimiles of the early printed editions may be consulted in Werner Helmich, *Moralités françaises: Réimpression fac-simile de vingt-deux pièces allégoriques imprimées aux XVI^e et XVII^e siècles*, vol. I (Geneva: Slatkine, 1980).

confession, and satisfaction. In *Bien Avisé Mal Avisé* (late fifteenth century) — another twin-protagonist play — Mal Avisé's companion Folie introduces him to Oysance, 'fille aînée de Paresse' and whose 'mamelles troussées' make quite an impression on the eager youth. She explains her predilection for certain pastimes: 'Jouer vueil aux dez et aux tables, | A l'eschiquier, aussi auz quilles'; and we soon see Mal Avisé in the tavern being introduced to all manner of 'jeux defamiables' (p. 27). What seems to be important here, as in other moralities, is not so much the rules of the games as the increasingly deplorable behaviour of the players — their mutual accusations of cheating, the ensuing arguments and protests resulting in violence and other sinful activity that can lead to the very fires of hell. Indeed the games played so boisterously in these plays present a sort of 'slippery slope' motif of escalating sinfulness as one excess leads inevitably to another. Cheating is a case in point, figured by Tromperie in *L'Homme juste et L'Homme mondain*, who on one level may signify simply the 'bluffing' that is an accepted part of gambling; later in the play, however, reduced to impoverishment by Tromperie, Homme Mondain will need fine clothes and wealth if he is to resume his rightful place on Fortune's Wheel,²⁸ and these he will acquire from Avarice, Usure, even Simonie.

A mode of sinful behaviour to which the *moralités* take particular exception is that of blasphemy and its association with gambling, which many a contemporary confession manual similarly condemned. In *L'Homme juste*, as Tromperie scoops up her winnings, Ire ironically attributes Mondain's heavy losses to his inability to blaspheme effectively:

Que dyable n'es tu diligent
Pour jurer et te courrocer?
Tu ne pourras rien embourser
Se Dieu ne despites et jures! (p. 619)

The same theme is extensively elaborated in *Les Blasphémateurs du nom de Dieu* (an unusual morality play variant on Christ's Passion) in which the sin of blasphemy is represented by three personifications:²⁹ Le Blasphémateur, Le Négateur, and L'Injuriateur who, following a physical and verbal attack upon a Crucifixion statue, are condemned to torture in Hell — all except L'Injuriateur whose genuine

²⁸ The Wheel of Fortune in these plays is a closely related figure of man's propensity to sin, often externalized by means of business with costumes: mankind's worldly success may be represented by kingly apparel and attributes as he sits on the *rota Fortunae* but will soon be followed by his being stripped naked in a gambling school. (See Hindley, 'Wheeling and Dealing', pp. 138–43.)

²⁹ Reproduced in Helmich, *Moralités françaises*, II, 103–57.

repentance saves him. More graphically than most, this play shows how gambling can be portrayed not just as an enjoyable 'plaisir mondain', but as an activity that can lead to damnation itself, depicted successively in this play by the appearance of Guerre, Famine, and finally Mort.³⁰

A picture thus emerges from the morality plays of an Everyman figure who is the inevitable loser because his opponents are either the deadly sins or related vices and thus the embodiment of evil. In *L'Homme pecheur*, as in Gréban's *Passion* (lines 25,595–644), Sinner's tutor is Le Diable, who similarly explains the significance of the numbers on the dice:

Quant au regard du premier point
Comme il est pointé vous appere.
C'est en depit de Dieu le Pere.
Le second point, je vous affis,
En despit du Pere et du Filz.
Les poins de la ternité,
En despit de la trinité,
Et en ce point ne par Esperit. (p. 242)

The games depicted in the *moralités* are more varied than in other play-types. They differ considerably in nature, but most — even certain card games that required a modicum of skill — tend to be condemned as games of chance, which is probably why chess does not feature among them. This is also why Fortune's Wheel is sometimes presented as a related motif in the moralities, both used by playwrights as a variation on the traditional *psychomachia* for the Christian soul. There is a parallel between the unpredictable rotations of the *rota Fortunae* and the random activities of the gambling table: to roll dice or play cards leads inevitably to damnation.

Sottie

Nowhere in the late medieval French theatre is the notion of drama as pure 'play' more explicit than in the *sotties*, where the homonym *sot/saut* reflected in the acrobatics characteristic of the theatrical fool is frequently demonstrated as they make their entry into the play. Such physical tours de force sometimes mirror the actors'

³⁰ A game of 'hazart' in *L'Homme pecheur* (pp. 2241–48) carries a similar message: Homme pecheur gambles with three 'empeschements', i.e. young men-about-town who represent here mankind's inherent sinfulness, and are called 'Crainte-de-Faire-Penitence', 'Esperance-de-Longue-Vie', and 'Desespoir-de-Pardon'.

verbal agility too, as can be seen in the quick-fire opening of a play like *Les Sotz qui corrigent le Magnificat*.³¹ It can be found in slightly more developed form in the antics of the two fools of the *Sottie de Trote Menu et Mirre Loret*,³² who play a game in which Mire Loret, hands behind his back and blindfold, captures with his teeth a coin that Trote Menu has affixed to his forehead. He succeeds easily, but when it is decided he should attempt to replace it by the same process, the winner quickly becomes the loser. For unbeknownst to Mire Loret (who remains blindfold) Trote Menu has bared his arse, leaving his companion the task of replacing the coin on a very different portion of his anatomy. As a piece of stage-business, it may leave something to be desired. But the role reversal it embodies — from winner to loser in one fell swoop — does highlight an important interaction that we shall return to below in the context of farce.

The idea of play as children's game is of course implicit in the organization of the fools in the kingdom of folly itself, with their Prince, and particularly their Mère Sotte, famously supported by her 'Enfants' in the celebrated woodcut and *devise* adopted by Pierre Gringore. Indeed many of the fools' societies, those secular bourgeois descendants of the Fête des Fous, denote their membership in their very titles, which often draw attention to their youthfulness: Enfants-sans-souci, Collège des Bons Enfants, Prince de Jeunesse. This childlike exuberance and supposed 'innocence' of the fool is sometimes reflected in characters that actually represent children in these plays, and since children naturally 'play', we occasionally see them involved in specific games, as in Gringore's *Jeu du Prince des Sotz*, where Le Général d'Enfance is characterized by his hobby horse and by his *moulinet*,³³ the latter evoking the game of 'moulinet' found in Gargantua's list. Could 'Le Général' be a distant relative of the boy-bishops of the Feast of Fools, depicted in Gringore's play as 'sans houseaulx et sans bottes' (line 119), ready to fight a mock battle in support of his 'Prince' (i.e. Louis XII)? The Général is somewhat more developed in *Les Sots qui remettent en point Bon Temps*,³⁴ where the band of sots provide a rousing build-up to his entrance at line 101, mounted on his hobby-horse. His companions allude to his love of the game of 'la fossette' and of 'billes' (line 93); they also appear to refer to his spinning-top ('toupie', line 88). A mixture of man and boy, Le

³¹ *Le Recueil Trepperel*, vol. II: *Les Sotties*, ed. by E. Droz (Paris: Droz, 1935), no. IX.

³² *Le Recueil Trepperel*, ed. by Droz, no. XIII.

³³ *Le Jeu du Prince des Sotz et de Mere Sotte*, ed. by A. Hindley (Paris: Champion, 2000), pp. 63–117.

³⁴ *Le Recueil Trepperel*, ed. by Droz, no. XII.

Général may play children's games, but he is also given to 'des dames pousuyvant' (line 90), to which reputation there are other references in the text.

The fools of the *sottie* do not restrict themselves to innocent, disinterested play, however. Their double-edged games remind us of the polemical nature of plays in which performers who act the fool have a satirical agenda that the innocence we associate with play, just like their emblematic cap and bells, provided added protection from reprisal. A game may here provide a more sustained structure for a play, as in the *Sottie des Sotz ecclésiastiques qui jouent leurs benefices* and the *Jeu du Capifol*. In the first of these a card-school, significantly presided over by Haulte Follie, involves three 'sots ecclésiastiques' who gamble their benefices in a game that takes up much of the play's 376 lines.³⁵ The game in question is 'content' (cf. lines 139–40), probably a variation of Rabelais's 'maucontent'. It appears to involve Haulte Follie dealing to each *sot* in turn a card representing a particular type of ecclesiastical living, which the player can exchange until he is 'happy' with his selection.³⁶ Akin to our modern-day poker, and requiring much bluff and bluster, their game leads in this play — as sometimes in the *moralités* examined earlier — to arguments that border on violence, as the *sots* demonstrate their increasing greed for preferment and material wealth. All three *sots* have reached their positions in the Church by scheming rather than study. But they are not content with their lot, and demand not just 'prébendes', 'archidiaconés', and 'eveschés', but 'papalité' (line 341), even 'déité' (line 343). After seven hands, all the irate Haulte Follie can do is condemn her children's folly, for which she sees no cure:

Il faut, selon ce que je lis,
Que le grand deable vous emporte
[...]
Vous ne vous sçavez contenter,
Vous vollez aussi hault monter
Comme Dieu, mais vous estes folz. (lines 347–54)

The sharpness of this satire has led Droz to date this play *c.* 1511 and to situate it in the period following French attempts to clean up ecclesiastical graft begun by Charles VIII at the Commission de Réforme held at Tours in 1493, where concern was expressed about 'trafic des choses saintes, abus des indulgences, des pardons ou des quêtes, vénalités du culte [...] scandales des ordinations achetées, sacerdoce

³⁵ *Le Recueil Trepperel*, ed. by Droz, no. XVI.

³⁶ See the analysis of Jean-Claude Aubailly, *Le Monologue, le dialogue et la sottie: essai sur quelques genres dramatiques de la fin du moyen âge et du début du XVI^e siècle* (Paris: Champion, 1976), pp. 325–26.

rempli par des clerc sans vertus et sans lettres'.³⁷ It certainly has more bite than the routine anticlericalism of the farce or the fabliaux. The specific criticism of the abuse of simony (line 233), for instance, recalls the overtly polemical agenda that we see in Gringore's *Folles entreprises* (1505), *Jeu du Prince des Sotz* (1512), and *Sottie des Chroniqueurs* (1515).³⁸ All the more reason then for the playwright to lighten his treatment by exploiting game activities.

In the *Jeu du Capifol*, staged in Rouen c. 1535 according to its most recent editor,³⁹ the mechanics of a game we have already seen in the context of the Passion plays provides the framework for a satirical drama that targets not just one social group but the whole spectrum of society as represented by its four characters: Le Ministre de l'Eglise, Noblesse, Le Laboureur, and Commun. Its title may seem ambiguous: 'Le Jeu du Capifol, moralité à iiii personnages', but as Aubailly points out,⁴⁰ despite its use of allegory, the term *CapiFOL* suggests that its characters are fools not unlike the Sot Dissolu, Sot Glorieux, Sot Corrompu, and Sot Trompeur of the *Sotise à huit personnaiges*.⁴¹ Certainly the term 'Jeu' here refers quite clearly to the 'game' of *Capifol*, or *Que fery?*, which the downtrodden Commun is eager to play because as a game it will give him the immunity to give vent to his complaints: 'Je le veulx par esbatement', he says, 'Afin de parler librement' (lines 50–51), a case of Freudian game-psychology, according to Beck.⁴² Having drawn straws to see who will be 'It' (lines 59–77), Commun is the first to occupy the hot-seat — blindfold, as the rules demand — his stretched-out hand ready to be struck in turn by his fellow players as they ask 'De qui te plains tu?'. Unlike the buffeting of Christ episodes, where Jesus remains silent throughout, Commun has criticisms a-plenty but is thwarted by the cheating tactics of Le Ministre and Noblesse, who are in cahoots throughout the action and who refuse to play the game according to the rules. When Labeur's turn comes, his complaints of corruption in the Church

³⁷ Quoted by Droz in *Le Recueil Trepperel*, I, 340.

³⁸ In *Les Folles entreprises*, for instance, Gringore complains that 'Petiz enfans qui sont a peine nez, | Et ne scauroyent quasi moucher le nez, | Ont eveschez, dignitez, c'est la guyse. | *Abbayes, cures, prieurez, par saintise* | *Sont baillees, affin que l'entendez,* | *A des joueurs de cartes ou de dez*' (our emphasis). See *Le Jeu du Prince des Sotz*, ed. by Hindley, p. 114.

³⁹ See Jonathan Beck, *Théâtre et propagande aux débuts de la Réforme: six pièces polémiques du Recueil La Vallière* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1986), pp. 125–44: 'un petit chef-d'œuvre d'analyse socio-psychologique' (p. 13).

⁴⁰ Aubailly, *Le Monologue, le dialogue et la sottie*, p. 324.

⁴¹ See the recent edition by Olga Anna Duhl (Geneva: Droz, 2005).

⁴² Beck, *Théâtre et propagande aux débuts de la Réforme*, p. 13.

are closely linked to his criticism of the traditional Catholic doctrine of the 'deux sentiers' (line 155, i.e. faith and good works), as he declares instead his support for the Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith alone. The play thus constitutes a rare example of a 'Protestant' morality, staged in a town that only ten years earlier had burned its first 'heretic' at the stake. The lively game nature of the play, metrically enlivened by a deft use of the *rondeau dramatique*, allows its anonymous author to package in a concise and lighthearted way a keen satirical message in which a corrupt Noblesse and Ministre come off especially badly. Labeur and Commun find no solution to their grievances, however, and the *sottie* ends in an atmosphere of resignation:

Commun, prenons en Dieu confort;
 Car en ceste morte saison,
 Contre equité, droict et raison,
 De nous jouront a capifol
 L'un apres l'autre a leur plaisir. (lines 179–83)

The presence of two characters to represent the Tiers Etat is unusual, and may well designate a combination of both urban proletariat and rural working class, as Jean Batany has suggested.⁴³ But it seems more likely to be a doubling occasioned primarily by the nature of the game being played, enabling the playwright to oppose two social groupings within a structure that shows the corrupt duo of Noblesse/Ministre d'Eglise in a particularly bad light.⁴⁴

There are of course other kinds of game to be seen in the fools' plays. One of the best known — Gringore's *Sottie du Prince des Sots* — is built around a burlesque stage-battle between the forces of the Prince des Sots (i.e. Louis XII) and those of Mère Sottie-Eglise (Pope Julius II), a comic war-game that probably recalled for its spectators the traditional Shrovetide battle of Lent and carnival, thereby softening the play's satirical jabs at the pontiff.⁴⁵ Ludic effects are also produced by the many word-games that characterize these plays, often marked by a fondness for

⁴³ Jean Batany, 'Allégorie et typologie: le Tiers État dans quelques sotties et moralités', in *The Theatre in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Herman Braet, Johan Nowé, and Gilbert Tournoy (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1985), pp. 220–37 (pp. 230–31).

⁴⁴ A further interesting feature of this play is the nature of Noblesse, which designates here not so much the military aristocracy as the much despised 'noblesse de robe', a distinction made clear by Commun, lines 90–103.

⁴⁵ On this aspect of the play, see Jean-Claude Aubailly, 'Théâtre médiéval et fêtes calendaires', in *Between Folk and Liturgy*, ed. by Alan J. Fletcher and Wim Hüsken (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997), pp. 31–64 (pp. 44–46).

materializing a proverb or saying, as in *Les Sots qui remettent en point Bon Temps*. A specific aspect of the linguistic humour that seems to have become closely associated with the upside-down world of the *sottie* is the motif of *adynaton*, where folly is associated with attempting the absurd or the impossible, as in *Les Sotz qui corrigent le Magnificat*.⁴⁶ Such features, however, whilst reminding us of the abiding 'playfulness' of the genre, must remain beyond the scope of the present study.

Farce

Though there are relatively few examples of specific games employed in the farces, their close affinity with the world of the *fabliau* and *conte* have led commentators to draw attention to the game mentality implicit in the structure of many of them. In her discussion of the etymology of the term 'farce', for instance, dismissing its links with the culinary sense of 'stuffing' (*farcire*), Bernadelle Rey-Flaud points out that it is in appreciating its origins in the expression 'farcer' meaning 'duper, tromper' that we gain a clearer understanding of the comic 'mechanisms' of the genre.⁴⁷ They indeed often have to do with 'the games people play'. When in Gréban's crucifixion scene, the torturer Griffon and his cronies play their cruel 'jeux et esbatemens' (line 25,473), their consequences are quite different from the pranks that a farce character will play on others. These are often simply 'pour rire', as in *La Farce du Pourpoint rétréci*,⁴⁸ where Gautier and Richard play a trick on their neighbour Thierry by altering the size of his coat, thereby convincing him that he's suffering from terminal dropsy. Above all, they must be careful to keep a straight face (lines 82–83) in what is after all simply a *jeu* (line 356), a bit of fun directed at their hung-over drinking partner. As Richard puts it:

ce n'est que esbatement!
S'il mouroit, nous luy dirion
Que c'est jeu et le ferion
Menger qu'il en peust revivre. (lines 361–64)

⁴⁶ *Le Recueil Trepperel*, ed. by Droz, no. IX.

⁴⁷ Bernadette Rey-Flaud, *La Farce ou la machine à rire: théorie d'un genre dramatique, 1450–1550* (Geneva: Droz, 1984), Part II, chap. 1, 'La sémantique de la farce'.

⁴⁸ *Recueil de farces françaises inédites du XV^e siècle*, ed. by Gustave Cohen (Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America, 1949), no. XLIV. For bibliographical details of the farces referred to in this section, see the convenient checklist in Halina Lewicka, *Études sur l'ancienne farce française* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1974), pp. 136–47.

The 'revirement' that follows appears to take on a rather nastier turn, however. When Thierry seeks confession, Gaultier decides to dress up as a priest — provoking a 'jeu de costume' that renders Richard helpless with laughter — and they soon hear him confessing to not only having once beaten up Richard, but also having seduced Gautier's wife. To get their own back, they wrap him in a blanket and threaten to dump him in the nearest ditch. Their initial reaction may well be to 'Le tuer et luy couper la gorge' (line 840), but this is surely akin to cartoon violence, and our necessary distancing from the reality of the action ensures that we do not take it too seriously.

To examine the tricks and japes that provide the raw material of many of the 170 or so surviving farces would take us well beyond the present discussion as well as facing us with a perplexing 'embarras du choix'. But from the simplest 'parade' to the most complex scenario, the same combat of winners versus losers is often at their heart, reminding us of their affinity with the fabliaux, whose plots often have a comic formality similar to that of the game.⁴⁹ Scenes of gambling of the kind we have seen in the morality plays are relatively rare in the farces, however, where the winner/loser opposition is usually fought out not around the gaming table but in petty everyday incidents anchored in the realities of trade or professional life, the schoolroom, the church, the marketplace, and more often than not, the family group. In the latter category, the argument as to who in marriage shall wear the trousers may be dramatically reversed, as in *Le Cuvier*, where the wife's fall into the washtub suddenly affords Jaquinot — initially enslaved by the 'rollet' drawn up by his wife and mother-in-law — the chance to turn the situation around to his own advantage. Thus can the apparent loser become the unexpected winner.

In other farces, the 'light-the-blue-touch-paper-and-retire' principle comes into play, as we enjoy the unraveling of a mechanism set in motion at the beginning of the action. A good example is *Les Trois amoureux de la Croix*,⁵⁰ where a wife stage-manages assignations with three potential lovers by asking them to meet her by night at hourly intervals by the market cross, the first disguised as a priest, the second as a corpse, the third as the Devil. Here we delight, with the wife, in the playing-out of the action and in the mixture of terror and confusion the would-be suitors inspire in one another as each realizes he has been duped. Elsewhere it is the 'jeux de scène', often masked by a lack of stage-directions in the early printed

⁴⁹ See Brian J. Levy, *The Comic Text: Patterns and Images in the Old French Fabliaux* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), chap. 11, 'Laughing at Life: The Dice and the Dance'.

⁵⁰ *Recueil de farces françaises inédites du XV^e siècle*, ed. by Cohen, no. VIII.

editions, that highlight the playfulness of these entertainments. We shall also have to curtail detailed elaboration here of the linguistic playfulness — the *jeux de mots* — that are such a hallmark of the farces, described by Barbara C. Bowen as ‘le théâtre du cliché’,⁵¹ a feature that reveals these plays at perhaps their most imaginative. Sometimes this might simply involve a proper name, such as Jean (meaning ‘cocu’), which Jacquinot’s mother-in-law delights in calling him in *Le Cuvier*; one thinks too of the henpecked Ployart and his demanding wife Doublette of the farce that concludes Gringore’s *Jeu du Prince des Sotz*, a delightfully inventive pair of ‘noms prédestinés’! Modes of expression having more than one meaning are also much exploited, often in the portrayal of the ‘badin’. Thus Pernet, sent out by his wife and her lover to fetch wine, promptly uncorks it and pours it into a bucket, when they ask him to cool it by putting it in cold water (*Pernet qui va au vin*). Sometimes an entire action will revolve around a dramatized proverb or a figurative expression taken literally, a ‘double entendre’ occasionally announced in the title: *Les Droits de la Porte Bodès*, *Les Femmes qui font accroire à leurs maris de vecies que ce sont lanternes*, or the clearly obscene *Les Chambrières qui vont à la messe de cinq heures pour avoir de l’eau bénite*. The most elaborate and imaginative farce in this respect is, not surprisingly, *Maistre Pierre Pathelin*, where we are treated to all levels of linguistic humour from Pathelin’s meaningful name, demonstrated in the tour de force of the ‘divers langages’, via the draper’s failure to appreciate the figurative sense of *manger de l’oie*, and where the shepherd’s monosyllabic ‘bée’ satisfyingly turns out to have more purchasing power than Pathelin’s ‘beau langage’. In the end, it’s back to square one for Pathelin!

If the farces have preserved relatively few examples of the insertion of specific games into their action, one play in particular, *La Farce du Chaudronnier*,⁵² does however show how an audience’s knowledge of a game can be exploited to comic effect. The game concerned is the ‘Jeu de Saint Côme’, involving at its most basic derisory or outlandish offerings made to the saint, who tries to make the other players laugh; failure to keep a straight face results in becoming ‘It’ and thus taking the saint’s place. In some versions the saint has his face blackened and may be

⁵¹ Barbara C. Bowen, ‘Le Théâtre du cliché’, *Cahiers de l’Association Internationale des Études Françaises*, 26 (1974), 33–47. On both ‘jeux de scène’ and ‘jeux verbaux’ in the farces, see also Bowen’s *Les Caractéristiques essentielles de la farce française* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1964), pp. 35–48.

⁵² *Recueil de farces (1450–1550)*, ed. by André Tissier (Geneva: Droz, 1988), III, 79–115. Though published in Paris, c. 1550, the printed text is probably a version of a substantially earlier play.

blindfold.⁵³ The game is one of those played by the shepherds in the second half of Adam de la Halle's *Jeu de Robin et Marion*, a dramatized 'bergerie', in which a knight witnesses various pastoral activities such as games, songs, and dances.⁵⁴ Marion is distinctly reluctant to play at 'saint Côme', which she describes as a 'vilains jeu' (line 442), probably because of the unspecified, and probably obscene, offering made by Robin.⁵⁵ *Le Chaudronnier* combines this game with the 'silence wager' motif: a typically lecherous *chaudronnier* (hawker of pots and pans) happens upon a married couple who have agreed that the first to break their silence vow will thereafter be the subservient partner. The *chaudronnier* decides to make mischief by dressing them both up as statues, to which indignity neither can object because of their bet. He first converts the husband into a statue of the Pope, employing various objects of his trade — placing a spoon in one hand, a chamber pot in the other, using straw to create a false beard, and finally painting his face. He now refers to him not as saint Côme but as 'saint Coquilbaut' (line 142), evoking the spoof saint renowned for his priapic associations. Turning next to the wife, whose motto has earlier been established as 'women on top' (lines 56–57), our overheated hawker begins to turn her into a statue of Venus, to the accompaniment, no doubt, of much exaggerated groping. The humour here arises from the husband's foolish hesitancy initially to interrupt his wife's all-too-willing seduction by a complete stranger; there is also the appeal of the couple's differing reactions as they take part in a game whose rules they are unable to follow. The 'seduction' proceeds only so far, of course, as hubby finally 'cracks', leaving his wife to emerge victorious from their power struggle. Now in complete control, she invites the *chaudronnier* to accompany them to the tavern, a hint, perhaps, of the cuckolding that seems about to follow.

Conclusion

This essay on the games depicted in some plays of the later Middle Ages in no way claims that we are dealing here with semiliterate folk drama, even though such

⁵³ See Mehl, *Les Jeux*, pp. 108–09.

⁵⁴ See Adam de la Halle: *œuvres complètes*, ed. by Pierre-Yves Badel (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1995), pp. 206–85.

⁵⁵ On this, see the recent study by Rosanna Brusegan, 'Le Silence profond du "Jeu de Saint Coisme" dans le *Jeu de Robin et Marion*', in 'Contez me tout': *Mélanges de langue et de littérature médiévales offerts à Herman Braet*, ed. by Catherine Bel, Pascale Dumont, and Frank Willaert (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), pp. 57–66.

games might legitimately be described as popular, even ‘folk’, elements. What we have tried to show, rather, is how such games were used by often highly literate dramatists to their particular ends. As we have seen, the buffeting game that came to be associated with the Passion story is a development based on Gospel accounts and provides evidence of that familiar embellishment we see elsewhere in the religious theatre. With skilled playwrights such as a Gréban or a Michel they can be much more than a case of sugaring the doctrinal pill, but rather a means of persuading audiences to look differently at the crucified Christ and thus gain a more profound understanding of his relationship with fallen humanity. The games of the tormentors are thus closely linked to the Christian narrative of salvation. In the *moralités*, the games encountered — generally more numerous and detailed — are part of that condemnation of bourgeois pleasures that contemporary preachers similarly criticized. They not only include dice games, but also reflect the increasingly popular social game of cards, the latter involving more skill, perhaps, than merely casting the dice. Nevertheless, all are equated with mankind’s baser nature, and their reliance on chance provokes their condemnation here not just as a social evil but as a sin against God’s authority. The ‘playfulness’ of the *sottie*, apparent also in its distinctive linguistic register, is enhanced by a game mentality that serves particularly well its essentially satirical nature and its close association with the upside-down spirit of carnival. If, in the *farce*, such games are few and far between, it is perhaps more the general spirit of ‘gamesmanship’ that accounts for its wider appeal. In these plays, usually involving the interaction of knave and fool, the trickster and the tricked, we witness a comic structure, the very angularity of which evokes the spirit of the game and which by its very mechanical nature, often enhanced by its inventive linguistic humour, can provoke a totally disarming response even where violence may be involved.

Mehl’s volume provides much valuable detail towards what he calls ‘un savoir sur les jeux médiévaux’,⁵⁶ informing us of the nature and rules of games and their function in social terms. Here, however, I have been more concerned to show how, when a game is incorporated into a dramatic action, it can assume a fresh dynamic, its own ‘rules’ in turn subservient to the conventions of the dramatic medium that frames it, thereby setting up perspectives that dramatists can exploit as well as providing that important ‘check against illusion’ of which Kolve writes. For Kolve, indeed, this overlapping of ‘play’ and ‘game’ provides a vital clue to the medieval

⁵⁶ Mehl, *Les Jeux*, p. 24.

idea of theatre, in which truth is communicated ‘under pretence of play’.⁵⁷ As in the theatrical technique of the ‘play-within-the-play’, we are dealing not with real life, but with what Huizinga calls ‘a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own’, a world within the real world, which can be interrelated meaningfully by medieval playwrights — didactically, satirically, or just simply playfully — as they create that non-mimetic ‘game’ that is theatre.

Postscript

A glance at Appendix E of Elaine Block’s *Corpus of Medieval Misericords: France* reveals how games occasionally feature as a misericord motif, sometimes with a similar satirical edge to those we have seen in the *sotties*.⁵⁸ Indeed, several themes there listed (fools, devils, gambling monks, the battle of the sexes, etc.) all find echoes in the various play-types discussed, a reminder of the conjunction of certain themes of late medieval popular drama and of choir-stall carvings. Though precision is elusive in an area where conjectures are often hard to verify, Christa Grössinger has nevertheless drawn attention to possible connections between misericords and mystery plays, citing the dishonest Ale-wife in Ludlow Parish Church and the Chester Last Judgement.⁵⁹ Other echoes have been the subject of specific studies, including Kusue Kurokawa’s assessment of the influence of carvings on the Noah’s Wife of the Wakefield Master, and Elaine Block’s examination of the kind of inversions inspired by the topsy-turvy world of the misericords, including the ubiquitous sexual role-reversal so common in the farces.⁶⁰

A further aspect of such inversions is the extent to which proverbial idioms are literally portrayed, a feature equally prominent in some French secular plays, as well as the subject of Pieter Brueghel’s painting of *Netherlandish Proverbs* (1559). One such example concerns the animal proverb ‘to shoe the goose’ (Fr. ‘ferrer l’oie’),

⁵⁷ Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi*, p. 24.

⁵⁸ Elaine C. Block, *Corpus of Medieval Misericords: France* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003). See especially Appendix E, pp. 222–23.

⁵⁹ Christa Grössinger, *The World Upside-Down: English Misericords* (London: Harvey Miller, 1997), pp. 80–81.

⁶⁰ Kusue Kurokawa, ‘Noah’s Wife as a Virago: A Folkloric Figure in English Mystery Plays’, *Profane Arts of the Middle Ages / Les Arts profanes du moyen âge*, 5 (1996), 218–35; Elaine C. Block, ‘Physical and Social Inversions in the Topsy-Turvy World’, *Profane Arts of the Middle Ages / Les Arts profanes du moyen âge*, 7 (1998), 8–28.

attested Europe-wide, including a fine early sixteenth-century example in Beverley Minster.⁶¹ It depicts a farrier shoeing a goose as if it were a horse, a visual figure of the folly of indulging in impossible or fruitless labour or of interfering in the affairs of others. A French play of the same period, *Les Sotz qui corrigent le Magnificat*, is itself an enactment of a similar metaphor on the folly of unprofitable labour.⁶² Appearing here side by side with Maître Aliborum is a second pedant figure, Dando Mareschal, dressed as a farrier and who arrives carrying a goose. The garrulous pair will spend most of the play criticizing the clothes worn by three fellow fools who, in desperation, can finally only shut them up by giving literal expression to yet a further metaphor: 'mettre le frein aux dents' ('reduce to silence'). Halfway through the action, Dando explains his role as *domine fac totum*: 'Je ferre cest oyson', he points out, 'Ouy c'est toute ma leczon' (lines 188–90). Could it be, as Droz has suggested,⁶³ that Dando was just as popular a type as M^c Aliborum — that of the interfering busybody — but that other plays in which he appeared have since been lost? Whatever the reality, the example of this play, and of other parallels touched upon in this essay, might usefully prompt further comparative work in this area.

⁶¹ Other examples are found in Walcourt (Belgium), at Saint-Martin-aux-Bois (France), and at Whalley (England), the latter example incorporating a verbal gloss: 'Who so melles hy(m) of y al me(n) dos let hym cu(m) heir & shoe ye ghos'; Elaine C. Block, 'The Misericords of Saint-Martin-aux-Bois', *Profane Arts of the Middle Ages / Les Arts profanes du moyen âge*, 6 (1997), 26–38, reminds us (p. 30) that a similar image is found in Rabelais, who describes the young Gargantua attempting to shoe a grasshopper.

⁶² See Malcolm Jones, 'Folklore Motifs in Late Medieval Art I: Proverbial Follies and Impossibilities', *Folklore*, 100 (1989), 201–17, who briefly draws attention to the French connection in n. 51.

⁶³ See *Le Recueil Trepperel*, ed. by Droz, I, 185–215 (p. 214).

GAMES PEOPLE PLAY

Naomi Reed Kline

One of the joys of misericords is their depiction of ‘games people play’. We find depicted on misericords adults and children captured in a number of playful activities; for example, engaging in board games, ball games, pannoy, mock jousts, carrying whirligigs, and riding hobbyhorses.¹ These delightful secular images, references to childhood, are carved in wood and meant to relieve the serious minds as well as the tired buttocks of churchmen.

As delightfully as childhood innocence is depicted on misericords, one often finds that adulthood in the secular realm is depicted as fraught with strife, as ruinous ‘games people play’ in love and marriage. Women beat husbands, pull men’s hair or beards, and are rarely if ever shown in loving embrace. Numerous images of well-known themes of female dominance such as Phyllis and Aristotle or Samson and Delilah abound. Less overtly misogynistic but certainly negative are the many other situations in which women are portrayed as shrewish: Women and Men

I am greatly indebted to Gisela Estes for the English translations of the textual scrolls based on Kohlhaussen’s transliterations of the abbreviated texts on the boxes and to Howard Dinin for his editorial suggestions. This paper is part of a forthcoming book on medieval marriage boxes.

¹ Under the rubric ‘games’ examples of misericords by country may be found in the volumes of the *Corpus of Medieval Misericords*, by Elaine C. Block. For instance, see Elaine C. Block, *Corpus of Medieval Misericords: Iberia* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005): Jousting with Hobby Horses, sometimes with Pinwheels, p. 79; Pallet and Stick Games (including ball games), p. 79; Pannoy, p. 79. For France, see Elaine C. Block, *Corpus of Medieval Misericords: France* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003): Games and Pastimes, p. 222; Social Games, p. 223; Children’s Games, p. 223. There are numerous articles relating to ‘Sports and Pastimes’, for example, Christa Grössinger, *The World Upside Down: English Misericords* (London: Harvey Miller, 1997), pp. 170–73.

Fighting for the Pants, the Ale Lady, etc.² One hardly needs to consult Eric Berne's popular study, *Games People Play*, to recognize the psychological underpinnings of destructive relationships based on 'games' to be avoided depicted on misericords.³ Whereas the playful innocence of childhood games as depicted on misericords is without a hint of sexuality, the adult relationships to be avoided are depicted as shameful 'games' heaped upon men by women to undermine male sexual power. One assumes that these images that adorn the choir spaces occupied by celibate clergy are meant to indicate their cynical view of women couched in drollery.

Whereas this paper is not about misericords, it is inspired by Elaine Block's many iconographical studies of misericords that contain images of secular life. In considering the iconography of adult games people play, I have turned my attention to coeval works of art (largely fifteenth and sixteenth century) meant for *domestic* settings. I will largely limit my discussion to small objects, mostly boxes coded to their *secular* contexts. Rather than the dysfunctional marital games depicted on misericords, the games on these objects often fulfil Berne's definition of a 'good game' — a subject that, for obvious reasons, is only briefly touched upon in his study:

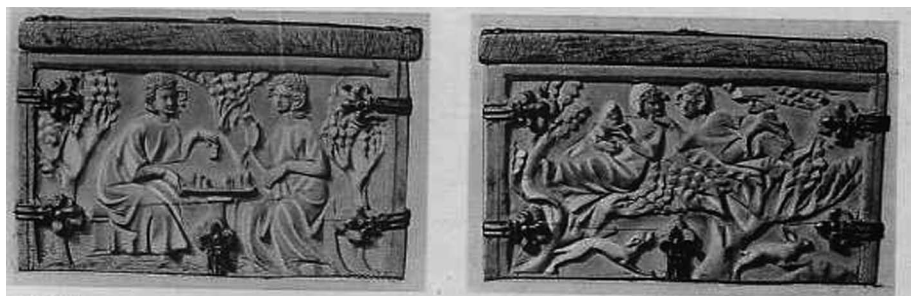
A 'good' game might be described as one whose social contribution outweighs the complexity of its motivations without futility or cynicism. That is, a 'good' game would be one which contributes both to the well being of the other players and to the unfolding of the one who is 'it'.⁴

In the secular realms, for instance, well known are the images on French ivory mirrors and boxes that depict a young man and woman involved in the game of chess. The lady's sexual charms (generally the folds on her lap are sexually explicit) help her to win over her male opponent (she has more pieces on her side). Although the male lover is generally shown holding the falcon, the sign of the hunter (she being the hunted, the prize is her sexual favour), she is in fact the winner of the match. Although it appears that the winner is dominant, it is a dominance that the male *desires*. The scene is frequently depicted on ivory mirrors as a single image whose reception is divorced from contiguous narrative scenes. As such its meaning

² For Spain, see Block, *Corpus of Medieval Misericords: Iberia: Marital Battle*, p. 80; Marital Scenes, p. 81. For France, see Block, *Corpus of Medieval Misericords: France: Proverbs*, p. 222; Women, p. 232. There are numerous articles relating to the 'power of women'; see Grössinger, *World Upside Down*, pp. 40, 87–95, 101–02, 128–33.

³ Eric Berne, *Games People Play: The Psychology of Human Relationships* (New York: Grove, 1964).

⁴ Berne, *Games People Play*, p. 163.



Figures 18 a (left), b (right). Cologne, Church of St Ursula. Images taken from Raymond Koechlin, *Les Ivoires gothiques français*, vol. I (Paris: A. Picard, 1924), no. 1266 pl. CCXVI.

is relatively unambiguous. The use of a single iconic image divorced from a narrative context is also frequently the case of how one interprets well-known images on misericords.

However, once we introduce both the secular context as well as a narrative context, the same images become more complexly embedded in a story. For instance, on a small medieval box with a similar image of lovers engaged in a game of chess on the front panel, we find that the second side of the box shows the young man chin-chucking the smiling lady as indicative of a 'draw' (Figures 18a and b).⁵ The lady may have won the game but by the same token the man has won the right to the chin-chuck, an allusion to sexual entry. Here the game of love is played to its sexual conclusion. Most scholars agree that these small boxes with scenes of lovers belonged to women and may indeed be 'marriage boxes' given as gifts by their partners, a subject to be pursued later in this paper.

In turning to ivory 'game boxes', small coffers more likely owned by men, it appears that the 'game' depicted is the literal hunt found on any number of other household objects given its centrality as a male pastime. In this case, however, as with most game boxes, the hunt may be read as a metaphor for sexual pursuit. On

⁵ Figures 18a and 18b are taken from Raymond Koechlin, *Les Ivoires gothiques français*, vol. I (Paris: A. Picard, 1924), no. 1266, Cologne, Église Ste-Ursule, pl. CCXVI, pp. 179–80. I am unable to find its present location. The two pieces are two sides of an incomplete ivory box. Figure 18a (left) is a depiction of a grove of three distinct and upright trees in which the lovers play chess. The man is about to make his move. Figure 18b (right) depicts the grove as lush, the woman is supported by one tree, and the man on his horse is partially hidden by another tree of broad foliage. It appears as though the young man is about to leave for the hunt and caresses the smiling lady's chin. The lady holds a small dog, the man, a falcon; below them a dog pursues a rabbit. The concept of the hunt is exaggerated. According to Koechlin, Molinier noted the same scene in coffret no. 1269 (Spitzer Collection), and perhaps also on fragment no. 1274, sold anonymously to London in 1906.



Figure 19. Game Box, French, ivory, fifteenth or sixteenth century. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Gift of Mr and Mrs Harry Friedman, 1954 (54.135). Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

such game boxes the hunt is generally shown on the long sides; on this box, two wild men with shields surround the keyhole. On the cover scenes of music and dance provide heightened excited accompaniment to the event (Figure 19).⁶ The 'box' that holds the 'game pieces' provides a metaphor for the hunt both literal and figurative. These boxes have not been specifically identified as belonging to either men or women, but to my mind they likely belonged to men.⁷

⁶ A discussion of ivory/bone game boxes and boards is included in *Images in Ivory: Precious Objects of the Gothic Age*, ed. by Peter Barnet (Detroit: Detroit Institute of Art, 1997), pp. 270–72.

⁷ Figure 19: Metropolitan Museum, 54.135. *Top* (six scenes): woman with harp; peacock; man with flute; man with stick; tree in circular enclosure with wattles; woman holding skirt of her kirtle. *Front*: tree pierced by keyhole; two wild men kneeling and holding shields on either side of the tree. *Right side* (long): man with spear attacking boar. *Back*: two dogs running to left; tree and unidentified motif (unicorn horns?) in centre. *Left side* (long): hunter on knee on right blowing horn; tree in centre; dog on left; small metal hinges on back; two small loops for cord (?). See R. H. Randall Jr, *The Golden Age of Ivory: Gothic Carving in North American Collections* (New York: Hudson Hills, 1993), pp. 128–29 (nos 195–97); Randall Jr, *Masterpieces of Ivory from the Walters Gallery* (New York: Hudson Hills, 1985), p. 238 (no. 358). There are a number of carved ivory/bone game boxes in museum collections: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 54.135; Victoria and Albert Museum, London, no. 4660-1859; Sold at SPB Brummer, 1949; Germanisches National Museum, Nürnberg, HG. 290; Walters Art Gallery 71.93 (Randall, *Masterpieces*, no. 358); Burrell Collection (noted by Randall, *Masterpieces*, p. 238); Abegg-Stiftung, Bern, Inv. no. 5.37.69. Notes on related boxes in Metropolitan Museum of Art files (Medieval Department): box sold at Sotheby's (London), 9 July 1987; box in the collection of Mrs. Ernest Brummer (*The Secular Spirit: Life and Art at the End of the Middle Ages*, ed. by Timothy B. Husband and Jane Hayward (New York: Dutton, 1975), p. 212); box sold at Christie's (London), 10 December 1996; box sold at auction Kunsthaus Lempertz (Cologne), 15 May 1993; box sold at Sotheby's (London), 10 December 1992; box, Princeton University 59–11 (*Images in Ivory*, ed. by Barnet, p. 270); box sold at Christie's (London), 13 December 1994; box sold at Christie's (London), 13 December 1994. For further examples, see Koechlin, *Ivories gothiques*, I, nos 1317–28; Koechlin identifies these as either complete game boxes or sections from game boxes: no. 1317, coffret, Paris, Musée de Louvre; no. 1318, coffret, Paris, Musée de Cluny; no. 1319, coffret, London, Victoria and Albert Museum; no. 1320, coffret, Paris, Musée de Louvre; no. 1321, plaque, Châlons-sur-Marne; no. 1322,

On the other hand, if we consider examples of personal objects specifically pertaining to women, often the metaphor of the hunt reverses traditional roles. Women 'entrap' the hunter/male in a variety of ways. Women are shown to use guileful methods of seduction in order to entrap their prey in bonds of love. In the case of these domestic objects, then, it is the woman who tames the man. She may dissimulate when 'playing the game', but the hunt must come to an end with a promise of fidelity.

A brief survey of the texts and images of a number of medieval *minnekätschen* of the same period is relevant to this discussion. Most of the boxes discussed here were catalogued by Kohlhaussen in 1928 and provide a vast array of comparative imagery.⁸ Kohlhaussen refers to them as *minnekätschen* and suggests that they are marriage boxes gifted by men and owned by women. Kohlhaussen provides us with a print that suggests the sexual reading of the 'box' was understood at the time, well before Freud. Consider this rather risqué print where the man offers the key to the box but the woman argues that the key is 'too small for her box', a clear reference to the box as her body (Figure 20).⁹

In the many examples of such boxes offered by Kohlhaussen, one finds examples that actually depict a man offering a box as a gift. If, on the one hand, the female body is the 'box' for which he requires the key, by the same token the actual gift box is a metaphor of its container. The gift box ensures the female's fidelity to the donor.¹⁰ Sexual fulfilment and fidelity are the sought ends to the games. Often the

plaque/coffret, Cologne, Kunstgewerbe Museum; no. 1323, coffret, Turin, Museo Civico; no. 1324, coffret, London, Victoria and Albert Museum; no. 1325, coffret, Paris, Musée de Cluny; no. 1326, coffer, Madrid, Museo Arqueológico Nacional; no. 1327, plaque, Cologne, Kunstgewerbe Museum; no. 1328, plaque, Niort, Musée. This list will be refined in a further study.

⁸ Heinrich Kohlhaussen, *Minnekästchen im Mittelalter* (Berlin: Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 1928). The term *minnekätschen* was not used in the Middle Ages; these boxes were then referred to as *lelin* (leather coffret) or *kistlin*. They are small boxes to contain valued possessions, such as jewellery; see *Secular Spirit*, ed. by Husband and Hayward, p. 25. I would also like to thank John Cherry for a reprint of his article, 'The Talbot Casket and Related Medieval Leather Caskets', *Archaeologia*, 57 (1982), 131–40.

⁹ This image is from Kohlhaussen, *Minnekästchen*, fig. 38. The subject is 'His key is too small for her lock'. It is a pen-and-ink drawing with colour wash, Flemish, c. 1470, Sao Paolo, private collection; illustrated in Malcolm Jones, *The Secret Middle Ages: Discovering the Real Medieval World* (Stroud: Sutton, 2002), colour plate XXIV. I am grateful to Walter Gibson for this reference.

¹⁰ For example, this is the case of Kohlhaussen, *Minnekästchen*, fig. 16a. The side image shows the man and woman in bed together as the gift in return! Numerous other *minnekätschen* show men offering their heart or a ring; e.g. Kohlhaussen, *Minnekästchen*, Kat. nos 56, 58, 79.



Figure 20. 'His key is too small for her lock', Sao Paolo, private collection. Pen-and-ink drawing with colour wash, Flemish, c. 1470. Illustrated in Malcolm Jones, *The Secret Middle Ages: Discovering the Real Medieval World* (Stroud: Sutton, 2002), col. pl. XXIV; Heinrich Kohlhasssen, *Minnekästchen im Mittelalter* (Berlin: Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 1928), fig. 38.

gift of a box, a ring, or one's heart presents the beginning of the narrative on the front panel. As such the man takes the first step to suggest his love.¹¹ In one example, the 'game' is literally presented; on the front panel the young lady responds to her lover's speech, 'ich red ger(n) ein wort mit vch' (I would like to speak a word with you), with her reply, 'red w(az) dv w(ilt) ich b(in) n(it) schuch' (Say what you will I am not shy). The back panel of the box shows the couple involved in a game of present day 'footsie', the lady 'seated' on a reclining male, her rump in his face! The lovers, surrounded by two groups of dancers, are accompanied by the text: 'shon min g gesel' (soon mine good mate) (Figure 21, a and b).¹² All is resolved on the side panels with professions of love and faithfulness.

On these boxes intended for women, men indicate how faithful they are. In spite of the male's vow, however, the woman sometimes plays 'hard to get'. When the woman indicates that she is unwilling, this only intensifies the desire on the part of the lover. The male lover is caught in the self-delusion of achieving domination or control. These are age-old female methods of entrapment on the part of women. For men, the hunt for a woman's love must be subtler than the literal hunt shown on those game boxes discussed earlier that I suggested belonged to men.

In many cases, women indicate that they are not quite willing; on one box the lady says: 'ich will es mir noch reiflich überlegen' (I will think about it plenty).¹³ It

¹¹ Numerous boxes have depictions of lovers holding hearts or rings as symbols of faithfulness. I limit my discussion to a selection of boxes from Kohlhaussen, *Minnekästchen*, with texts that reinforce this concept. For example, see Kohlhaussen, *Minnekästchen*, Kat. no. 54, Tafel 40 (Berlin, Schlossmuseum, K. 2794). This box's narrative follows a reading from the edges of the cover: 'Mein Schatz sei mit ganädig wenn ich mich von dir Scheiden soll' (My treasure, be kind gracious to me if when I must part from you). The image shows a man pointing to his heart with text 'si hat dahin' (she has it within); the woman holds a heart in her hand. Between them Frau Minne sits atop a crouching man, perhaps an allusion to Phyllis and Aristotle. This suggests the ultimate success of the woman's fantasy. *Front panel*: man: 'Dein war ich allein' (I am yours alone); lady: 'anders ercheine ich Euch nicht' (I don't [will not] appear differently to you). *Right panel*: man: 'Sei freundlich ohne Hinterhalt' (Be friendly without insidiousness). *Back panel*: man: 'Frau, gib mir Deinen Segenswunsch' (Woman give me your blessing); lady: 'Gott möge dich immer behüten' (May God always protect you). *Left panel*: man: 'Deine Treue mein Herz' (Your faithfulness my heart); lady: 'is dir sicher' (is assured to you). Also see text for Kohlhaussen, *Minnekästchen*, Kat. nos 56, 58, 79 as comparisons.

¹² Figures 21a and 21b: Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1963 (63.7); Kohlhaussen, *Minnekästchen*, Kat. no. 53, Tafel 39. This box is the subject of a forthcoming study.

¹³ For example, Kohlhaussen, *Minnekästchen*, Kat. no. 55, Tafel 41 (Vienna Sammlung Figdor, Nr1392). I was unable to find the present ownership of this object. This box follows a similar pattern as Kat. no. 54, the narrative leaves the woman's answer in abeyance. The box's narrative follows a

appears on several of these boxes that women do not trust the claims of fidelity that are suggested by the gifts. Sometimes a woman may be so stubborn as to require the intervention of Frau Minne (the German equivalent of the Goddess of Love) who upbraids the woman for allowing the male lover to suffer her indifference and requires of the lady to be faithful to her lover. Frau Minne is a familiar figure on these boxes; here the allegorical role of Frau Minne as teacher of the rules of love is suggested. The conversation between the Man, Lady, and Frau Minne are provided in the following example, which is translated from Kohlhaussen:

- a. Man: Yours I am,
Will you not be kind [gracious] to me?
I lament it complaining to Lady Venus.
- b. Lady: You foolish, silly man,
Don't you want to refrain from that,
[So] you may well be silly [ridiculous, absurd].
- c. Man: Pure, luck giving lady,
I desire to serve you,
Let it for god's sake please you.
- d. Lady: Be silent [quiet], fool, you make me raging [mad] —
When [as soon as] the sun goes backwards,
Then I will hear [answer] you.
- e. Man: Lady, refrain from such talk!
If you won't care about me graciously,
Then I am [will be] without joy.
- f. Lady: Do you want of your love,
Complain [lament] to Queen Venus —
That bothers [worries] me little.
- g. Man: Nevertheless tell you my heart:
Have you for me such suffering [yearning],
That is a big foolishness.

reading from the edges of the cover: 'Vul(n)er asti cor meum soror mea quia amo la' (You wounded my heart, my sister and bride, because I love). The image shows a pair of lovers between two trees; man: 'Frov du nimst mir ge(danc) vn si(n)' (You take away my thoughts of sin(?)); woman: 'zuo dir so zwingt(es) mich rech(t) (h)in' (to you it forces (drives) me quite). *Front panel* (the pair of lovers): man: 'Ich möchte gern ein Wort mit euch reden' (I wish to have a word with you); lady: 'red was du wilt ich bin nit scheu' (Say what you will, I am not shy). *Side panels*: running unicorn, resting deer. *Back panel* (the pair of lovers): man: 'Meinen Dienst emfanget, ich bitte darum' (My service receive, I am asking for it); lady: 'ich will es mir noch reiflich überlegen' (I will think about it plenty). According to Kohlhaussen, p. 83, the Latin text is related to *Altschwaben Liebesbriefen*.



Figure 21 (a and b). Casket, wood, Minnekästchen with lovers, German (Alsatian), end of fourteenth century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Rogers Fund, 1963 (63.7). Image: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

h. Lady: I have chosen you to be my loved one,
Will you give me such words,
Then I shall be at the end of my life.

i. *Cover*:

Man: Lady Venus, I lament to you,
That my loved one is spiteful,
She knows why.

Minne/Lady Venus: Of noble women it is wrong,
When they their faithful servants
treat so harshly.
It helps nothing for the duration,
Therefore let go, tender woman,
and while away your servant's suffering.

Lady: Lady Venus I shall be subservient to you
And remain completely faithful.¹⁴

In several cases we find that the female requires not only to entrap her lover but to chain him to weights in order to ensure faithfulness (Figure 22):¹⁵

Cover: Man on left: 'want an eyne sceiden ghevi' (When it goes to a parting); Woman on right has a ring in her hand and answers: 'an verlanghen met' (meide ohne verlangen; Forbear without asking(?)).

Front panel: Woman chains the man to a heavy stone (no text, no text needed!).

Back panel: Man: 'Ich jage in Treuen' (I hunt in faithfulness); Unicorn: 'dat en sal v nit rouwen' (das soll euch nicht gereuen; That you shall not rue).

The game is a ruse. The male provides the gift as an indication of his professed faithfulness and as a token assuring his singular access to the female's body; the female must entrap the man in turn because she questions his faithfulness. In other words, the metaphorical key to the box must be safely hung around her neck, as the

¹⁴ Kohlhaussen, *Minnekästchen*, Kat. no. 33, Tafel 28–30, Berlin, Schlossmuseum, K.3065; Kohlhaussen, *Europäisches Kunsthandwerk* (Frankfurt a.m.: Umschau-Verlag, 1969–72), p. 89, pl. XLI. I was unable to find the present ownership of this object. For discussion of Frau Minne, see Kurt Matthaei, *Das Weltliche Klösterlein und die deutsche Minne-Allegorie* (Marburg: Universität Marburg, 1907), pp. 32–42.

¹⁵ Figure 22: Paris, Musée national du Moyen Âge-Thermes et Hôtel de Cluny Cl 21381; Kohlhaussen, *Minnekästchen*, Kat. no. 79, Tafel 57. *Cover*: A man stands opposite a woman who holds a ring. There is an extensive bibliography on this box. It has been suggested that the meaning of this narrative is the quest for sublimated love based on Petrarch's theories of the tyranny of love that imprisons.



Figure 22. Coffret, wood, end fifteenth century. Paris, Musée national du Moyen Âge, Thermes de Cluny, Cl.21381. © Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Art Resource, New York.

key to her heart. And sometimes the woman must be cruel; she may grind a man's heart as a test of the man's faithfulness in spite of the psychological torture she puts him through (Figure 23).¹⁶ Often texts relating to such images show connections to texts of songs of *minnesingers*, a topic to be developed in another paper.¹⁷ This general theme is particular to a group of German boxes and has been suggested as being derived from poems and lieder of Oswald von Wolkenstein (1377–1445) whose lyrics often speak of the unmerciful hurt to a man's heart based on one-sided, if not provisional love.¹⁸ This type of image may at first appear to resemble

¹⁶ Figure 23 is found in Kohlhaussen, *Minnekästchen*, Kat. no. 47, Tafel 50 (Sammlung Prof. Dr W. Weisbach). The text is described as unreadable. *Cover*: woman near a tub with drain-ridge approaches with bended knee a young man. *Front panel*: the lady shaves (grinds) his heart. *Back panel*: the lady holds a bird stand made of wooden pincers, upon which a bird has landed. The image, according to Kohlhaussen, is related to the 'Der Vogelsteller' of Oswald von Wolkenstein.

¹⁷ See *Poesie d'amour du Moyen Âge allemand*, trans. by Danielle Buschinger, Marie-René Diot, and Jean-Marc Pastré (Amiens: Centre d'Études Médiévales, 2001); Ernst Meyer, *Die gereimten Liebesbriefe des deutschen Mittelalters* (Marburg: N.G. Elwert'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1899); Kohlhaussen, *Minnekästchen*, pp. 39–45.

¹⁸ Many of von Wolkenstein's lyrics lament the tortured heart of the male lover enslaved by an unmerciful woman. A good visual example of this is 'The Mortification of Vain Pleasure' in which we see the sadistic cruelty of women where an angel is shown nailing a lover's burning heart. See



Figure 23. Image taken from Heinrich Kohlhaussen, *Minnekästchen im Mittelalter* (Berlin: Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 1928), Kat. no. 47, Tafel 50 (Sammlung Prof. Dr W. Weisbach).

the misogynistic images on misericords; however, they differ insofar as they attest to *desire* rather than marriage that goes awry. These images are closely tied to the chivalric codes over which Frau Minne presides.

In the courtship process, as depicted, there is yet another manner in which women may bring the male lover into submission and faithfulness — by having the fictively virile ‘wild man’ steal her away. The remedy for the young lover is to prove his own virility by fighting the wild man and rescuing his lady.¹⁹ In the sagas and fairy tales of virtually all contemporaneous European cultures there are ‘wild men’.²⁰ Their physical size varies. They are covered with hair; they are spirits of the woods. Within these scenarios the wild men live, sometimes alone, sometimes with a household of their own. The aspect that is most shown on the boxes (as opposed to the numerous versions of wild men on misericords) is the wild man who robs

Betty Kurth, *Gotische Bildteppiche aus Frankreich und Flandern* (Munich: Riehn and Reusch, 1923), Abb. 5 (Bibliothèque Royale Albert I, Brussels). The idea of German lyrics influencing the imagery on similar boxes was noted in *Secular Spirit*, ed. by Husband and Hayward, with specific reference to the Manesse Codex.

¹⁹ Kohlhaussen, *Minnekästchen*, Kat. nos 95, 96.

²⁰ There is a vast literature on the topic of the wild man. For an introduction, see Timothy Husband, *The Wild Man: Medieval Myth and Symbolism* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1980).



Figure 24. Minnekästchen, wood, fourteenth century, Historische Museum Basel 1870.508.
Photograph © HMB.

maidens by force, whereupon the ladies are rescued by their lovers.²¹ Given that the wild man appears naked and lusty, he stands in comparison to the more comely and courtly, well-accounted lover. An ordinary man, when judged against his wild and presumably more appetitive counterpart, may try himself to assume the guise of a wild man. However, the ruse may fail with the consequence that the woman acquires the upper hand (Figure 24).²²

On the boxes the messages are mixed, but the games are played according to the rules of *desire and flirtation*. They represent the methods of female wiles. Flirtation is employed to entrap the lover with the objective of marriage. And yet, if the boxes

²¹ For examples, see Kohlhaussen, *Minnekästchen*, Kat. nos 95, 96, 162.

²² Figure 24: Basel, Historische Museum; Kohlhaussen, *Minnekästchen*, Kat. no. 42, Tafel 54. *Cover*: dog: 'Ich dein als mir gebote(n) i(st)' (I do as I am commanded); *Front panel*: under the key: 'lass es geschehn' (let it happen); lady: 'ich tue es, wenn mir behagt' (I will do it when/if it pleases me); bird: 'lass nicht ab' (don't let go). *Back panel* (woman on left, man on right, both seated): man: 'Stäte True send ich dir' (constant faithfulness I send to you); woman: 'Die hast du auch von mir' (That you have also from me); dog at side of woman: 'Bleibe stat' (remain constant); bird facing man: 'Stat' (Constant); dog at man's side: 'Ich belle' (I bark). *Left panel*: woman leads a chained wild man; she holds a branch with which to hit him; wild man: 'Zam und wild macht mich ain Bild' (I appear as tame and wild).

are gifts from their lovers, then the games are games of which the lover is aware. When all is said and done, the games will end. The hunt will be over: presumably from the male perspective in female submission; from the female perspective with the promise of male fidelity.

Clearly art is culturally and historically linked. Misericords often depict the pitfalls of secular life with an insistent misogyny. However, in the examples of the secular objects included in Kohlhaussen's study shown here, the hopes and desires of both partners are inscribed. As narrative devices, the games depicted are the positive games that lead to fidelity.

Whereas until now I have limited discussion largely to northern European objects, I would like to simply introduce other cultural variants of marriage boxes that suggest further inquiry. For instance, on coeval Italian wooden boxes decorated in gold on rice *pastiglia*, believed to accompany bridal chests (*cassone*), we find that the pool of images is drawn from biblical and antique sources only rarely related to women. In the cases where women are included they are the agents or victim of violence. For instance, on a small *pastiglia* box in the Hyde Collection in Saratoga Springs, New York, the four scenes depicted are, clockwise beginning with the front panel: Diana in a bath while hunters pursue Actaeon as a stag; a man aims a bow and arrow at a woman on a centaur; the Rape of Europa; Orpheus, surrounded by animals.²³ On another *pastiglia* box of a similar nature, we find, clockwise from the front: the Rape of Europa; Sacrifice of Marcus Curtius; Triumph of Love; and Apollo and Daphne.²⁴ Apparently the images of the Triumph of Love or Orpheus Playing the Lute provide a romantic perspective, but to the modern viewer the 'games' heroes and gods play suggest erotic fantasies of violation, a subject to be later developed.

My ruminations end with a metal box that is unlike all others discussed here (Figure 25). It is unique to my knowledge and, although of Italian provenance, most likely made by a German craftsman. The box, dated 1460–80, is a marriage box for a Jewish bride. It is a box that is meant to hold the keys of the bride's linen closet. Its front illustrates the three commandments that are to be observed by a Jewish woman. On the lid are dials to keep track of the inventory of the linen closet.²⁵

²³ I am indebted to the Hyde Collection, Glen Falls, for supplying me with photographs of this object.

²⁴ Marisa Zaccagnini, *Pastiglia Boxes: Hidden Treasures of the Italian Renaissance* (Florence: Centro Di, 2002), Cat. no. 6.

²⁵ Figure 25: Jerusalem, the Israel Museum, Bridal casket. Iris Fishof, *Jewish Art Masterpieces from the Israel Museum, Jerusalem* (Southport: H. L. Levin Associates; Jerusalem: Israel Museum,



Figure 25. Bridal casket, Northern Italy, cast and engraved silver, niello, partly gilt; second half of fifteenth century. Gift of Astorre Mayer, Collection, Jerusalem, The Israel Museum.
Photograph © The Israel Museum, Jerusalem by Yoram Lehmann.

Whereas the Italian *pastiglia* boxes and the single example of a German box made specifically for a Jewish bride provide us with iconographical material unlike the Kohlhaussen examples, one imagines that their narratives are also tied to the cultural environment from which they derive. By finding these images in the personal and secular realm they, too, in their own fashion, satisfy fantasies of games marital partners play, one would hope, to the satisfaction of both partners. I have departed from the realm of misericords because it is the context and narrative of these boxes that profoundly differs from the iconography of marital life on misericords. However, without the bold direction and comprehensive scholarship of Elaine Block this paper could not have been written.

1994), pp. 94–95; Mordechai Narkiss, ‘An Italian Niello Casket of the Fifteenth Century’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 21 (1958), 288–95. *The Israel Museum, Jerusalem*, ed. by Irène Lewitt (London: L. King, 1995), p. 117.

THE FOOLISHNESS OF OLD AGE

Christa Grössinger[†]

When we think of art in the Middle Ages it is usually religious art that springs to mind, yet art was punctuated by great bouts of laughter, and medieval priests frequently used humorous, even bawdy anecdotes in order to retain the attention of their congregation when teaching a moral example. Such moral tales were much easier for the listener to remember if spiced with humour. In art before the middle of the fifteenth century, humorous stories and grotesques were confined to the margins of manuscripts, only available to the very rich, or misericords hidden behind the choir screen. It was with the advent of printing that such motifs gained wide circulation because they could be printed in large numbers and, most importantly, could be produced at a price affordable to many more people. The low subject matter previously found in the margins of manuscripts was now transferred to single sheet prints which began to proliferate in Germany in the second half of the fifteenth century, often done by engravers who originated from goldsmiths' workshops. Furthermore, prints could be used as patterns. This meant that artists no longer had to make drawings from other works but could buy their prints and copy them. Thus, certain themes became very popular across several countries, such as the Battle of the Sexes, and all kinds of human foolishness propagated at the end of the fifteenth century by Sebastian Brant in his *Ship of Fools*, printed in Basel in 1494. Hence, the men and women we meet in

Regrettably, Christa Grössinger passed away shortly after completing this essay. Efforts have been taken to trace copyright holders and seek relevant permissions for use of illustrations, although we believe that this had been done previously by the author. If any oversight has occurred, please contact the volume editor in the first instance, and the publisher will seek to rectify matters at the earliest reasonable opportunity.

secular prints are all foolish and delusional, desperately running after a dream, and none are more so than the old.

The old may have been revered in the Middle Ages, but with the beginning of the Renaissance youth became the ideal as in classical art, and the old who were holding on to power and preventing their young sons from taking over were greatly resented.¹ Once over sixty, they were expected to relinquish their power and start preparing for their graves, to turn their thoughts away from this world, and to be a font of resigned wisdom. Such thoughts were backed up by medical science which taught that their blood flowed more slowly, reducing their body heat. However, what we see illustrated in art and literature is the lascivious and greedy elderly ruled not by reason but by their bodily desires, following the dictates of foolishness, rather than wisdom. In chapter 5 of the *Ship of Fools* the picture illustrating this text shows a crippled and unkempt old fool on two sticks, resisting the pull of the tomb, with his buttocks exposed and his scabbard swinging (Figure 26). Sebastian Brant here speaks of those who are very old, facing Death in fact, and yet not wise, behaving like naughty children of one hundred years old. This association between old age and childhood is often made apparent in the *Cycle of Life*. An early example is the Psalter of Robert de Lisle, where the ages from childhood to imminent death are contained within ten medallions that encircle the all-seeing head of God like the spokes of a wheel.² The whole miniature is flanked in the bottom corners by the child sitting upright (Infancy) and a reclining old man (Decrepitude), and at the top a seated knight (Youth) and an old man on a stick (Old Age). The first stage contained in the medallions shows the mother with her baby on her knees, warming broth over the fire, and accompanied by the inscription: 'Meek am I and humble, I live on pure milk.' The second stage represents a child holding scales with the text: 'Never shall I stumble, I measure up my age.'³ Following the seated king at the top of the *Wheel of Life* claiming the whole world as his, the decline starts immediately, showing an aged, hooded man already using a stick in the next medallion. Soon we come to the old man on his death bed, the doctor ominously holding up the urine flask and the text confirming: 'Given over to feebleness, I begin to fail.' Death follows, and the ninth medallion shows the priest celebrating Mass over the

¹ George Minois, *History of Old Age: From Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 249.

² London, British Library, MS Arundel 83, fol. 126^v. Lucy Freeman Sandler, *The Psalter of Robert de Lisle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 42.

³ In the miniature the artist has made a mistake and reversed the second and third stages, but the inscriptions are in the correct order.



Figure 26. From Sebastian Brant (1459–1521), *The Ship of Fools* (1494).

bier, with the text reading: 'I thought that I would go on living, life has deceived me.' The last stage at the bottom of the wheel shows the dead man's tomb with the words of the text: 'I have been turned into ashes, life has deceived me.'⁴

In placing the old opposite to the child, their childish qualities were highlighted in a negative sense, that is, their bodily weakness and loss of control rather than the child's innocence.⁵ Basically, the system of rising and falling remained, but towards the beginning of the sixteenth century the theme became popular in woodcuts where the men and women were placed on ascending and descending steps, as in the case by Jörg Breu (1540), where the ten steps are accompanied by symbolic animals representing the ages in niches underneath. On the first step is the cradle, followed by the toddler and young man; at the top sits the mature man, and behind him stands Death having shot an arrow in the direction of the ascending figures. On step seven a man sits dejected and melancholic with a rosary in his hand, and on number eight one with a stick pointing at the old, bearded man playing with a child who runs into his arms on number nine, and below him on the right stands the bier. The arch underneath the composition surrounds the Last Judgement.

Erasmus, too, saw old men as fools relapsing into infancy. Folly, however, would make it bearable for it made people cheerful.⁶ Furthermore, the old were characterized as ugly, lecherous, avaricious, and greedy; in short, as cruelly grotesque, thus reflecting an evil soul. Bernardino of Siena (1380–1444) described the old body as symbolic of transience and vanity of the world, and Erasmus as 'dirty, bent, wretched, wrinkled, hairless, toothless, sexless'.⁷ Yet, as he says, they refuse to recognize their condition and dye their white hair, cover up their baldness with a wig, or even borrow teeth taken from a pig, while their craziness for a girl will top any amorous silliness of the young.⁸ Women above all were considered monstrous in their endeavour to improve on their looks in order to make themselves more attractive to men. The best example of this is Quentin Massys's so-called *Ugly Duchess* (London, National Gallery). Massys was acquainted with Erasmus, and very likely with Erasmus's thoughts on old women as expressed in his *In Praise of*

⁴ See Lucy Freeman Sandler, *The Psalter of Robert de Lisle* (London: Harvey Miller, 1999), for the Latin text.

⁵ Shulamith Shahar, *Growing Old in the Middle Ages: Winter Clothes us in Shadow and Pain*, trans. by Yael Lotan (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 3.

⁶ Minois, *History of Old Age*, p. 260 and n. 22; Desiderius Erasmus, *Praise of Folly* (London: Penguin, 2004), chap. 13.

⁷ Shahar, *Growing Old in the Middle Ages*, p. 45. Erasmus, *Praise of Folly*, chap. 13.

⁸ Minois, *History of Old Age*, p. 260; Erasmus, *Praise of Folly*, chap. 31.

Folly: 'Yet it's even more fun to see old women who can scarcely carry their weight of years and look like corpses that seem to have risen from the dead. [...] They're for ever smearing their faces with make-up and taking tweezers to their pubic hairs, exposing their sagging, withered breasts and trying to rouse failing desire with their quavery whining voices, while they drink, dance among the girls and scribble their little love-letters.'⁹ Hans Weiditz, in particular, is famous for his grotesque images of people, and one of his woodcuts, c. 1536, turns the relationship between childhood and old age into a farce: an old woman, her body shaped by her enormous breasts, is accompanied by two little children holding windmills; she is richly dressed with a betrothal garland on her forehead, yet her face is old and wrinkled, and contrasts with the breasts advertising fertility and milk in plenty.

Such representations of old age revolved around the ability to still make love, contrary to expectations, and not to give up the bodily pleasures of life. Usually, a lecherous old man would provoke laughter and mockery.¹⁰ Women, whatever their age, were considered biologically incapable of controlling their sexual urges, and this got worse with old age, as amply illustrated in Frans Huys's engraving of the *Lute Maker's Shop*. Here, old women bring their lutes, symbolic of the female womb, to be repaired, that is, to have their sexual appetites restored and gratified. The old woman entering through the door is aptly accompanied by a half-naked little boy to guide her in, while inside the door sits the owl, bird of darkness, and by the window a cat, symbol of lechery. This engraving is also interesting for showing a series of woodcuts over the mantelpiece of *Dancing Peasant Couples at Kermes*, by H. S. Beham. Peasant festivals were infamous for sexual transgressions, and thus comment upon the main scene.

The most popular theme in art that expressed the lechery and greed of old people, along with the combination of revulsion and fascination in the audience, was that of the *Unequal Couple* or *Mercenary Love*. This theme illustrates the overthrow of the medieval concept of courtly love in which the woman was idealized, for here she is brought down to earth, and portrayed as the more powerful character in a relationship.¹¹ In art, the theme is first found in the drypoints by the Master of the Amsterdam Cabinet (Housebook Master) which often came in pairs of the old man greedy for a young girl's love and she for his money, or vice versa. His half-figure portrait of an *Old Man with Young Woman* was among the prints

⁹ Erasmus, *Praise of Folly*, chap. 31.

¹⁰ Shahar, *Growing Old in the Middle Ages*, p. 78.

¹¹ Alison G. Stewart, *Unequal Lovers: A Study of Unequal Couples in Northern Art* (New York: Abaris, 1977).



Figure 27. Albrecht Dürer, *Mercenary Love*.

copied by the illuminator of the Hours of Charles d'Angouleme in the early 1480s and also by the engraver Israhel van Meckenem.¹² The theme became extremely popular at the beginning of the sixteenth century. In Albrecht Dürer's engraving the old man and younger woman in her housewife's bonnet sit under a tree (Figure 27), and she puts her hand into his large purse, while holding her own small purse

¹² Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS lat. 1173. Anne Matthews, 'The Use of Prints in the Hours of Charles d'Angouleme', *Print Quarterly*, 3 (1986), 4–18 (p. 6).



Figure 28. Misericord, London, Westminster Abbey, Henry VII's Chapel.

at the ready; this composition was copied on a misericord in Westminster Abbey, Henry VII's Chapel (Figure 28). H. S. Beham's unequal couples are hip-length and framed by a window arcade. In one of these woodcuts the wrinkled, crooked-nosed old man leers at the young woman and gropes her breast, while she faces outwards, has one hand in his purse, and with the other holds up a large coin to the spectator. When the roles are reversed the old woman ogles the young man, who wears a wedding garland, and she caresses his chin while he delves into her enormous bag of money. Hans Baldung Grien in his engraving of 1507 makes the young woman even more alluring, while the lecherous old man fondles her exposed breast, and she looks at the spectator knowingly and puts her hand into his purse. That such behaviour was considered most reprehensible was underlined by the presence of the Devil, as seen in the drawing of an unequal couple by Urs Graf, where the Devil puts an ass's ear on the woman, for the young man will never be faithful; he is holding out his thin purse to be filled. In Quentin Massys's painting *Ill-Matched Lovers* of c. 1520/25 (Washington, DC, National Gallery) the fool accompanies the pair, whilst in the engraving by Lucas van Leyden, the old man is characterized

as a lecherous old fool whose only hope of success with the woman is his large purse. Lukas Cranach the Elder, too, took up the theme of *Unequal Couples* with gusto, usually showing a young prostitute in velvety dress helping herself to the old man's purse. In one example (Düsseldorf, Kunstmuseum), c. 1530, the old, almost toothless man offers the woman strings of beads, while she plays with his unkept beard.¹³ In another example, Cranach has three couples sitting around a table with a glass and a bowl of fruit on it. The 'equal' couple mocks the other two, the young man with old woman in the centre, and the old man with young woman on the left (Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Gemäldegalerie), c. 1540.

Such unequal marriages were compared to the crossing of species by some writers, and could even be forbidden by law as in the thirteenth-century laws of King Alfonso X of Castile and Leon.¹⁴ The ludicrous but wealthy old man in such cases is always jealous of his young wife who cuckolds him without fail, a theme well known from Chaucer's Wife of Bath and Old January who married young May in his *Canterbury Tales*, and also found in the satirical treatise on the *Fifteen Joys of Marriage* by Gilles Bellemère, bishop of Avignon 1390–1407.¹⁵ Sebastian Brant writes of the foolishness of marriage for the sake of wealth, for if a young man takes an old woman as his wife, none will experience a single day of happiness. There won't be any children, and the money will only remind him of his stupidity; he will mistreat her, she will be given to outbursts of rage and defiance, and at the end, nothing will be left but the foul smell of dung. The woodcut illustrating this text shows the young dandy taking the large bag of money offered by the old woman with one hand, and getting the whiff of foul odour from the donkey as he lifts its tail; so he can't have the one without the other.¹⁶ Jacob Cornelisz van Oostanen illustrates the blindness and deception of such unequal marriages in a picture entitled *The Spectacle Seller* (Brugge, Groningen Museum). In the foreground the attractive young woman sells the infatuated old man glasses; she will most certainly deceive him and he won't see that he is being cuckolded. Framed by this couple is the reverse situation further back, where a young man makes up to

¹³ According to Dieter Koepplin and Tilman Falk, *Lukas Cranach, Gemälde, Zeichnungen, Druckgraphik*, 2 vols (Basel: Birkhäuser, 1976), II, 567–68, Cranach could have picked up the theme from his predecessor at the court of Saxony, Jacopo de Barberi; also, the influence of Quentin Massys is to be considered, who himself was influenced by Leonardo's grotesque figures.

¹⁴ Shahar, *Growing Old in the Middle Ages*, p. 79 and n. 43.

¹⁵ Minois, *History of Old Age*, p. 223.

¹⁶ Sebastian Brant, *Ship of Fools*, ed. and trans. by Edwin H. Zeydel (Ithaca, NY: Columbia University Press, 1944), chap. 52.

an old woman in order to grab her bowl of money. The surroundings speak of wealth, with a well-stocked dresser. Presiding over the whole scene is the fool with his bauble looking through his fingers, a gesture well known to stand for seeing but not wanting to see, as used by a cuckolded husband in Sebastian Brant's *Ship of Fools*, chapter 33, entitled *Marriage Break-up*. Nevertheless, in real life the man was often older than his wife because he had to be in a position to support a family, and if he was widowed once or twice, the gap in ages would widen ever more.¹⁷ There are also many known cases where at the death of a master craftsman his widow would marry one of the young assistants in order to keep the workshop going.

The stupidity of old men is even more obviously satirized in the so-called *Love Triangles*. Here, the infatuated old man plies the young woman with money for her love, yet she passes it all on to her young lover. Hans Vogtherr's woodcut of c. 1540 makes this very clear, where the old man, thinking he is very clever, has locked the woman into a chastity belt; she, however, passes on to her flamboyant lover not only the money, but also the key to her chastity belt (Figure 29). The engraving by Urs Graf of c. 1511 shows the same theme: the old man fondles the young woman's breast, while she passes the coins to her young lover. All the objects of worldly pleasure are on the table before them, but below the *memento mori* warns: 'Consider the end — that is my counsel when everything finishes with death.' So here, the outcome of such human foolishness is made quite clear, for death may strike suddenly and sinners caught in the act won't have time to repent and will end up in hell fire.

Old women were not only foolish but also evil; in fact, they were more than a match for the Devil, as seen in a woodcut by Barthel Beham, c. 1532, illustrating a carnival theme by Hans Sachs, where in a battle with the Devil the old hag with bulging purse is about to give him a good beating. This motif was also found on playing cards that often acted as patterns, such as the *Seven of Grapes* by Erhard Schön. Also, the cunning old woman could be in league with the Devil, and create dissent and tragedy in the lives of the most virtuous. Most of all, old women were jealous of the love of the young, as illustrated by H. S. Beham, when at the end of a *Peasant Dance* (1537), a peasant woman looks on while a couple make love, saying: 'I too want to join in' ('Ich will auch mit'). Old women were much more experienced in sexual matters than old men, and thus able to advise the young on intimate matters of the nether regions.¹⁸ This familiarity gave them access to obscene

¹⁷ Shahar, *Growing Old in the Middle Ages*, p. 80.

¹⁸ Jan M. Ziolkowski, 'The Obscenities of Old Women', in *Obscenity: Social Control and Artistic Creation in the European Middle Ages*, ed. by Jan M. Ziolkowski (Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp. 73–89 (p. 87).



Figure 29. Hans Vogtherr the Younger, *Woman with Chastity Belt between Two Men*.

language and behaviour which resulted in the picture of old women as 'bawds' and its derivative 'bawdry'.¹⁹ When too old and ugly to satisfy her carnal desires, the old woman turns procuress and makes good money out of administering love potions and arranging the sexual bliss of young couples. Many are the depictions in manuscripts and prints of the young enjoying love in a bathtub, served by an old procuress, as in the illustration to the *Planet Venus* by the Master of the Housebook, where she brings in the food of love (Figure 30). The theme is made quite explicit in Erhard Schön's and H. S. Beham's woodcuts, depicting the *Triangle of Love* in an alehouse, where the old procuress passes the money originating from the



Figure 30. Master of the Housebook, *The Planet Venus*.

purse of the man on the right on to the young man in the doorway, and where the fool comments on the foolishness of the scene (Figure 31). The text by Hans Sachs accompanying this print has the heading: 'A conversation by five people. The school of the procuress.'²⁰ This scene was very popular and was picked up by other artists, such as Lucas van Leyden.²¹ Thus, although old women are equal to old men in their foolishness, they have the added quality of being capable of great evil intent, and this taken one step further can make them into demonic old hags, that is, witches teaching the young and able

¹⁹ Ziolkowski, 'Obscenities of Old Women', p. 73.

²⁰ *Die Welt des Hans Sachs*, ed. by K. H. Schreyll and others (Nürnberg: Hans Carl, 1976), p. 82, cat. no. 80.

²¹ Both Erhard Schön and Lucas van Leyden may have used the same original pattern.



Figure 31. Erhard Schön, *The Triangle of Love*.

to prepare secret love potions, as can be seen in the works of Hans Baldung Grien. Old men were duped by young women, and their foolishness was highlighted by the fact that many of them, such as Aristotle, Virgil, and Solomon, had been known for their great wisdom. In spite of their age and wisdom they would have their heads turned, because women in general were considered wily and able to exert their power over men. These foolish old men were thus presented as a warning to others, to be mocked and laughed at. For example, the wise old philosopher Aristotle, the tutor of Alexander the Great, who used to admonish Alexander for his love of a common woman, became so infatuated with her himself that he was totally dominated by her. The image of the woman (often called Phyllis) riding on Aristotle and whipping him is found in all the arts, and once again, it is a theme readily picked up in the graphic arts, expressing the *Power of Women*, for example, by the Master of the Housebook. The sexual passions of Aristotle and the woman are highlighted in the woodcut by Hans Baldung Grien, where both are in the nude, and the woman wears the married woman's headdress (Figure 32). Virgil, too, known as a great sage, fell in love with a young woman, but when he attempted to visit her in her tower room she left him hanging in a basket halfway up, for all the town to gawk and laugh at him the next morning. This is



Figure 32. Hans Baldung Grien, *Phyllis Riding Aristotle*.

illustrated by Lucas van Leyden in two prints. Even worse, King Solomon from the Old Testament was diverted from his true faith to worship pagan idols because of his love for loose women, a story also engraved by Lucas van Leyden.

Examples such as these involving wise men from biblical and classical sources (King David and Bathsheba, Judith and Holofernes, Samson and Delilah) combine the theme of foolishness with that of the *Power of Women*, for the foolishness of old men, although held up as a warning, is tempered by the irresistible power of women's wiles against which there is no remedy. So old men always have an excuse to explain their foolishness; they are not evil like old women, just simple-minded. Daniel Hopfer, in his etching of the *Sausage Seller*, shows the grotesqueness of their foolishness when they succumb to the old woman and worship her as though in a wild delirium. She wears the horned headdress indicative of devilish intent, her wrinkled breasts are bulging, and her double goitre points to her extreme stupidity in the spiritual sense, for she is clever enough to tempt the men with the phallic symbols of sausages and drink to intoxicate them. Thus she is the great temptress who leads them into damnation.²²

One of the most enduring themes of the old and not so old, even nowadays, is the craving for everlasting youth, and the most important aspect of youth is the ability to practice sex and the belief that sex keeps the body young. The rejuvenation process was to be achieved through the *Fountain of Youth* and the *Furnace of Youth*. The earliest known depiction of the *Fountain of Youth* is in the French *Roman de Fauvel* (1316–20) which shows an antithesis between the Fountain of Youth and Life, for the waters of salvation become contaminated with evil.²³ The taking of waters had always been deemed beneficial, and many spas were famous for their curative power. Hans Sachs takes up the motif of the *Fountain of Youth* in one of his Master Songs, where he has a dream of a large, round marble fountain with twelve spouts of cold and warm water, and of the old arriving by cart, on crutches, or carried piggyback and being tipped into the water. After one hour in the water, they all jump out rejuvenated and in high spirits, like twenty year olds, while he, Hans Sachs, wakes up and realizes that, at the age of sixty-two, no herb on earth will rejuvenate him. What is depicted in art are the old, mostly women, carried piggyback or in wheelbarrows by their spouses, and tipped into the youth-

²² The etching is based on an engraving by Botticelli, 1475–90 in the Berlin Kupferstichkabinett, where the woman holds a pig's trotter.

²³ Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS f. fr. 146, fol. 42. Anna Rapp, *Der Jungbrunnen in Literatur und bildender Kunst des Mittelalters* (Zürich: Juris-Verlag, 1976), p. 49; for a summary of origin, see p. 120.

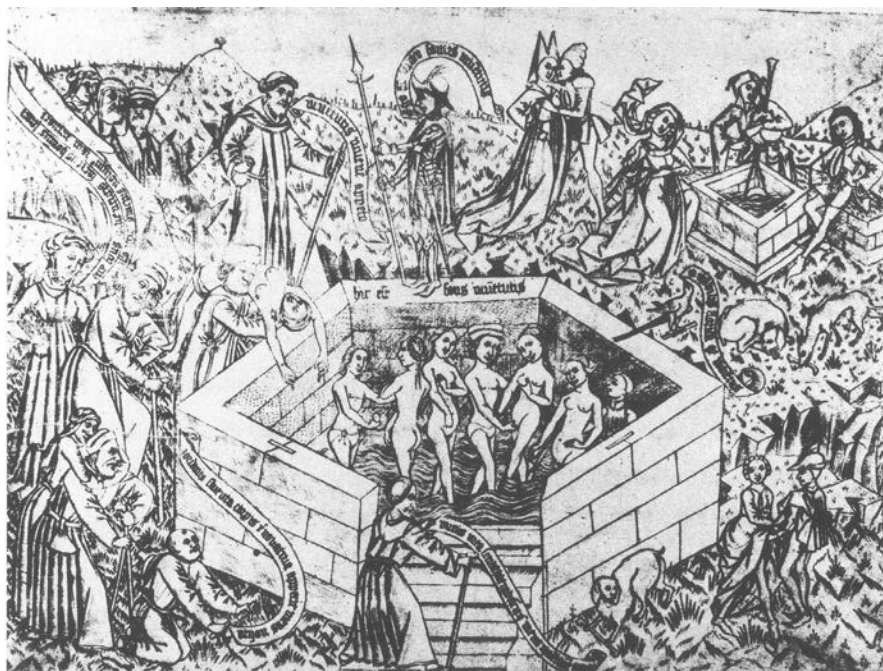


Figure 33. Master of the Banderolles, *Fountain of Youth*.

giving fountain. After their transformation the new, youthful nudes jump with joy, and couples embrace and clamber out on the other side to start a new life of tender love-making, as illustrated in a painting by Lukas Cranach the Elder (Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Gemäldegalerie). This new life, however, is not with the original spouses who are now deemed far too old. The Master of the Banderolles, c. 1460–70, identifies his hexagonal basin with ‘hic est fons iuventis’, and the old monk with a stick and money purse is welcomed by the keeper of the fountain (Figure 33). The monk standing on the step holds a scroll inscribed, ‘my power wanes because of my old age and my soul thirsts for youth’. The other scrolls all have similar texts in praise of — and expressing desire for — youth. That all this behaviour is considered most foolish is emphasized by the presence of a fool playing the bagpipes, who joins in. The fool is representative of the sin of lechery, and he became an essential part of the Fountain of Youth, as seen in Erhard Schön’s woodcut (Figure 34). Here, the fool urinates into the fountain from a penis in the shape of a cock. Many of these fountains can also be called *Fountain of Love*, for they depict the erotic pleasures of the bath, as seen in the work of Lukas Cranach the Elder, on prints and on bathroom walls. H. S. Beham created a large (375x1090 mm) woodcut



Figure 34. Erhard Schön, *Fountain of Love or Youth*.

of the Bath in the 1530s, of which the Fountain of Youth forms the left part. Again, the old are carted into the fountain where there is an immediate transformation, and in the left middle ground, the rejuvenated are seen dancing around a bonfire of crutches. The right-hand side of the Large Bath is given to sensuous and obscene love making, strengthening the association of baths with brothels.²⁴ A clay model from the end of the fifteenth century shows two women enticing the fool himself, who stands for human foolishness, into their bath to have their pleasure with him.

The Furnace of Youth reminds one of medieval chemical experiments; it involves purgation and probably the cleansing of sins. As in the case of the Fountain, the old are carted along and, after paying for the privilege, are tipped unceremoniously into the furiously flaming fires. Down they go to reappear through the furnace door fresh and young. Two anonymous woodcuts from c. 1540, published in Augsburg, show the women reappearing in the nude, and the men as young dandies (Figure 35 and Figure 36). In 1540 a theatre performance is recorded in Utzendorf, Kanton Bern, in which old women are recast as young. This is also the theme of a moral poem by Hans Folz from the first quarter of the sixteenth century, concerning the origin of apes.²⁵ Furthermore, it is a folk motif at the heart of a series of Shrove Tuesday performances given by the master smiths of Deventer in 1543, where old women are forged into young ones. The old woman who undergoes the process, however, comes out uglier than ever.²⁶ Another method of rejuvenation was through the *Old Wives' Mill*, used for both genders. The earliest remaining illustration of this is in a Dutch woodcut of c. 1600, but older carnival plays of this event are known, as performed in Thorn in West Prussia in 1440.²⁷ The tradition of the *Old Wives' Mill* still lives on in the South of Germany, in Tripsdrill (between Karlsruhe and Heilbronn), where the carnival play written in 1787 is still performed.

Apart from commissioned portraits, the old in art were satirized, often to the extent of grotesqueness, an image propagated, above all, by early sixteenth-century

²⁴ Many of the figures were copied from Albrecht Dürer and Marcantonio Raimondi, who in turn copied from Michelangelo and also Dürer.

²⁵ Rapp, *Der Jungbrunnen in Literatur*, p. 47.

²⁶ Gerard Nijsten, 'Feasts and Public Spectacle: Late Medieval Drama and Performance in the Low Countries', in *The Stage as Mirror: Civic Theatre in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. by Alan E. Knight (Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1997), pp. 107–34 and Appendix pp. 135–43. Malcolm Jones, *The Secret Middle Ages: Discovering the Real Medieval World* (Stroud: Sutton, 2002), pp. 238–39.

²⁷ Jones, *Secret Middle Ages*, p. 239.



Figure 35. Anonymous, *Furnace of Youth*.

prints which, if made in Nuremberg, would often include a farcical text by Hans Sachs. They were listed with the low stratum of society, alongside cripples and strangers.²⁸ A typical old couple would be the *Old Couple Eating* by Master bxg, of c. 1480, where for extra emphasis on their stupidity, she has a goitre and he a stone of madness, or the *Rustic Couple*, 1526, by an anonymous German artist from Augsburg (Figure 37). They are perhaps not as old as they are made to look, but they are decidedly low class and uncouth. The man carries an owl, as a nobleman would hold a falcon as a sign of wealth and with which to go hunting. Hunting birds also stood for hunting love, and the owl was symbolic of spiritual blindness and evil. The text backs up the idea of hunting after women. It says:

²⁸ Shahar, *Growing Old in the Middle Ages*, p. 3.



Figure 36. Anonymous, *Furnace of Youth*.

I have copulated many a day
 So much so that I have done enough of it
 I used to like being called a bird catcher
 Yet now I have to keep company with owls.²⁹

Always love — or, rather, lechery and lust — consume the minds of the old, and although there is a propensity to depict bad and foolish behaviour in the low, peasant class, the old in the themes examined are mostly well-off, middle-class citizens who have money to spend on love and youth, and the prostitutes are quite sumptuously dressed. Their portrayals are both moralizing and humorous. Walter Gibson picks

²⁹ 'Hab oft gevoglet manchen tag | So fil das ich yet's nimer mag | noch wolt ich gern ain vogler haissen | So muss ich yet's mit ülen bayyssen.' Anna Rapp, *Der Jungbrunnen in Literatur*, p. 82.

TALKING DIRTY: VERNACULAR LANGUAGE AND THE LOWER BODY

Paul Hardwick

At the end of the 2003 International Reynard Society Colloquium in Louvain-la-Neuve (Belgium), I was invited by Elaine Block to join her on a trip to the Basilique Mineure Saint-Materne in Walcourt. It was here that I encountered a misericord carving which had been discussed at one of the stimulating iconography round-table sessions which Elaine had chaired at the international conferences at both Kalamazoo and Leeds for a number of years (Figure 38). On this occasion, discussing this enigmatic image in its original material context, it began to cast light onto others, suggesting a complex interrelationship between apparently disparate elements — both pictorial and textual — all relating to broader concerns of the late medieval period. This essay will draw upon some of these quite diverse elements in order to suggest that the widespread prominence of the scatological in late medieval culture — including depictions in sacred spaces — may be a response to concerns about the rise in status of European vernacular languages and the concomitant empowerment of the laity. I will begin by considering the curious carving from around 1515–20 in Walcourt.¹

Two figures are portrayed on the Walcourt misericord, one naked from the waist down, the other with breeches lowered, squatting back-to-back over what initially looks like a pile of spoons.² Georges Dereine, noting that spoons were

¹ On dating, see Georges Dereine, *Les Stalles de chœur de la Basilique Mineure Saint-Materne à Walcourt* (Namur: G. Dereine, 2000), p. 15.

² A similar arrangement of figures, although without the ‘spoons’, may be found on a misericord in Seville Cathedral. The Seville image is discussed by Elaine Block, who points to a Flemish proverb, also illustrated by Bruegel, in which couples who always do everything together are said



Figure 38. Misericord, Basilique Mineure Saint-Materne in Walcourt, Belgium. Photo: Verspaandonk / Collection CKD, RU Nijmegen.

uncommon items of tableware in the early sixteenth century due to cost, identifies these characters as ‘spoon-makers’. He sees in this scene a representation of avarice: for the miser everything has value, even excrement.³ Whilst an interesting interpretation — and one which, indeed, has a firm grounding in medieval associations between excrement and money, as may be seen in the carving of a figure explicitly excreting coins on a misericord in the Oude Kerk, or Sint Nicolaaskerk, Amsterdam — the spoon, however costly, is undoubtedly a rather unusual symbol for wealth. Indeed, are these items in fact spoons at all? Upon closer inspection, I am inclined to agree with Paul Aangenendt, who suggests that the items apparently being excreted are either eyeglasses of the type which may be seen scattered across different media of medieval art or, perhaps, mirrors.⁴ This may not appear to bring

to ‘defecate through the same hole’: Elaine C. Block, *Corpus of Medieval Misericords: Iberia* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), p. 44.

³ Dereine, *Les Stalles*, p. 15.

⁴ Paul Aangenendt, ‘Stalles avec représentations optiques’, *Profane Arts of the Middle Ages / Les Arts profanes du moyen âge*, 8 (1999), 29–30. A particularly fine example of eyeglasses may be found

us any closer to an understanding of the scene, until we recollect that, from the simple rebus to more complex symbolism, puns are common currency in misericord carvings and, indeed, marginal culture. We will return to our enigmatic defecators in due course, but it will be illuminating to first consider a related pun and, indeed, the more general slippery nature of words themselves.

Perhaps nowhere in late medieval literature is the joy in punning so evident than in the early sixteenth-century adventures of *Till Eulenspiegel*, a work drawn upon extensively by Maeterlinck to illustrate the context of late medieval scatological humour within which he places the Walcourt carving.⁵ At about the same time as the Walcourt carvings, around 1510, an unknown author either composed or compiled this collection of scurrilous, scatological tales, the hero's name of which translates literally as 'owl mirror'. As the narrator informs us:

Now, Eulenspiegel had this custom whenever he did some mischief where he was unknown: he took chalk or coal and drew an owl and a mirror over the door, and underneath wrote, in Latin, *Hic fuit*.⁶

However, this literal interpretation, although supported in the narrative by the protagonist himself, is but one reading of the name. Paul Oppenheimer points to the pun on 'Ul'n speghel' — from 'ulen', to sweep or wipe clean, and 'spiegel', arse or behind — literally an instruction to wipe one's arse. Combining these two readings, he goes on to note that, 'the book, and the hero's name, may thus at least be understood as the "mirror of the stupid and wicked", together with the less delicate image of arse-wiping or cleaning implicit in it'.⁷ Nevertheless, if such a reading of the hero's name leads us to expect a series of moral tales in which corruption and stupidity are wiped clean, we will be disappointed, for Eulenspiegel himself is unencumbered by moral concerns. The one overriding social concern of the book is, rather, that of the day-to-day use of language, the currency of social intercourse which, whilst essential, is of its very nature imprecise. I would like to suggest that it is this matter of the imprecision and, indeed, instability of language which informs the mirror or glasses / backside pun depicted on the contemporary image at

on a misericord at Saint-Jean-de-Maurienne (Savoie). Mirrors, both with and without handles, are very common in misericord carvings, appearing with particular frequency as attributes of mermaids.

⁵ L. Maeterlinck, *Le Genre satirique, fantastique et licencieux dans la sculpture Flamande et Wallonne* (Paris: Jean Schemit, 1910), pp. 178–87.

⁶ *Till Eulenspiegel: His Adventures*, ed. and trans. by Paul Oppenheimer (New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 84.

⁷ *Till Eulenspiegel*, ed. and trans. by Oppenheimer, p. lxiii.

Walcourt,⁸ and in the remainder of this paper will explore possible reasons why such an image may have been deemed appropriate for inclusion in the church choir.

The author/narrator of *Till Eulenspiegel* — who refers to himself simply as ‘N’ — introduces his tales with a brace of commonplace apologies:

[I] would like to beg everyone’s pardon so my narration puts no one in a bad mood or embarrasses anyone. That would be far from my desire.

My only ambition is to create a happy feeling in hard times, so my readers and listeners may experience good, pleasant entertainment and fun. Also there is in my rather plain writing no art or elegance, because I am, I’m sorry to say, unfamiliar with written Latin and am a simple layman.⁹

On the latter point, we may recall Chaucer’s disingenuous claim, ‘My wit is short, ye may well understonde’,¹⁰ yet N’s specific mention of Latin here serves to emphasize the foregrounding of the vernacular — in this case Late Middle High German — in the book.¹¹ The former apology also mirrors those we may find in Chaucer, both in *The General Prologue* and, more pointedly, in the Prologue to *The Miller’s Tale*, in which the Miller’s glib phrase — ‘Avyseth yow, and put me out of blame; | And eek men shal nat maken ernest of game’ — clearly and unconvincingly contradicts his overt enmity with the Reve.¹² We shall have cause to return to Chaucer’s Miller again later, but for now I would just like to raise the possibility that not only does N acknowledge that some of his audience may take offence, but also that this offence is intentional. Whilst the low comedy of the amoral hero of *Till Eulenspiegel* is very much in the *fabliau* tradition, it differs from these works — including *The Miller’s Tale* — in its lack of sexual activity on the part of the protagonist. Indeed, there are almost no references to sex throughout the book, and none of those few which are included is central to the narrative. Rather, in *Till*

⁸ A more direct connection between the backside and glasses is made on a partition in the stalls of León Cathedral, Spain, with a full-buttocked, bespectacled bottom. This image is reproduced and discussed in Michael Camille, ‘Dr Witkowski’s Anus: French Doctors, German Homosexuals and the Obscene in Medieval Church Art’, in *Medieval Obscenities*, ed. by Nicola McDonald (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2006), pp. 17–38.

⁹ *Till Eulenspiegel*, ed. and trans. by Oppenheimer, p. 3.

¹⁰ Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, I (A) 746. All citations refer to *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

¹¹ As Oppenheimer notes in his summary of scholarship, it is generally accepted that the work was composed in Late Middle High German by an author accustomed to writing in Low German, thus accounting for the occurrence of Low German words and phrases. *Till Eulenspiegel*, ed. and trans. by Oppenheimer, pp. xxviii–xxix.

¹² Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, I (A) 3185–86.

Eulenspiegel, the main focus of what we would today call ‘gross-out humour’ is excrement, as a couple of chapter headings will serve to demonstrate: ‘12. How Eulenspiegel became the sexton in the village of Büddenstedt, and how the priest shitted in his church and Eulenspiegel won a barrel of beer’; or ‘35. How Eulenspiegel cheated the Jews at Frankfurt-on-the-Main out of a thousand guilders, by selling them his excrement as prophet’s berries’. As if the matter needed further emphasis, a significant number of illustrations in the earliest known editions dwell on episodes involving excrement.

Scatological humour, of course, is not uncommon; the aforementioned *Miller’s Tale* is not alone in Chaucer’s oeuvre in its focus upon, if not shitting, at least farting. I’m sure that we would not have to think too hard to find examples up to the present day — not all of them from the playground — based on the assumption that the lower bodily functions are inherently funny, and it is certainly a prominent source of humour in the medieval *fabliaux*, which, as Howard Bloch notes, ‘revel in scatology’.¹³ What is significant about the scatological humour of *Till Eulenspiegel*, however, is that the unruly acts of defecation occur in a context of linguistic concerns. In the first of the chapters mentioned above, for example, Eulenspiegel wins a wager with a priest by taking literally the priest’s colloquial expression that he can ‘shit in the middle of [the] church’ if he so desires; when precise measurement reveals that the ‘really large pile’ is not precisely in the middle, Eulenspiegel claims his winnings.¹⁴ In the second, Eulenspiegel sells a group of Jews excrement, claiming that they are ‘prophet’s berries’ which, if placed in the mouth and up the nose will allow the recipient to ‘speak the truth forever after’. Whilst the purchasers assume that this signifies the gift of prophesy, the only truth spoken by the rabbi upon tasting the ‘berries’ is that they have been cheated and that ‘this is nothing other than human excrement’.¹⁵ Whilst the frequent association of scatological humour with the Church may make the reader search for Rabelaisian commentary upon theology and religion,¹⁶ this is at best a partial explanation, as Eulenspiegel’s

¹³ R. Howard Bloch, *The Scandal of the Fabliaux* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 35. See also pp. 54–56.

¹⁴ *Till Eulenspiegel*, ed. and trans. by Oppenheimer, pp. 22–23. This wilful interpretation of figurative vernacular language at face value is, as Alan Hindley notes in the postscript to his essay in the present volume, a common feature of misericord carvings, in which playfulness is used in order to reinforce home truths.

¹⁵ *Till Eulenspiegel*, ed. and trans. by Oppenheimer, pp. 70–71.

¹⁶ For a stimulating discussion of the scatological in Rabelais, see David LaGuardia, ‘Doctor Rabelais and the Medicine of Scatology’, in *Fecal Matters in Early Modern Literature and Art: Studies in Scatology*, ed. by Jeff Persels and Russell Ganim (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 24–37.

anal responses, as may be seen from these two examples, are not limited by faith; indeed, they are equally provoked by the secular world. For most of these anecdotes — along with those adventures of a less scatological nature — centre, like our first example here, upon Eulenspiegel's wilful misunderstanding of the 'plain' vernacular language which is privileged in the author's foreword, whilst the others, like our second example, apply variations upon this linguistic theme.

This connection between the vernacular and anal emissions may be detected somewhat earlier in Chaucer's *Miller's Tale*. We have noted that the *Tale* is prefaced with an injunction, similar to that in the author's foreword to *Till Eulenspiegel*, instructing the audience 'Avyseth yow, and put me out of blame; | And eek men shal nat maken ernest of game', and it goes on to culminate in the chaos following Nicholas's thunderous, blinding fart in Absolon's face. Unlike Eulenspiegel, however, Nicholas's act does not go unpunished for, of course, Absolon has the hot iron 'kultour' at the ready to scorch his 'toute'.¹⁷ But what is the significance of the 'kultour', rather than any other, equally painful, artefact literally 'hot' from the blacksmith's anvil? As James Morey has noted:

a smith often appears in the many analogues to the *Miller's Tale*, but he is one of the lovers who does the branding himself, and the instrument is almost always a generic 'spit' or 'great iron' [...] but in the *Miller's Tale* [...] the word 'cultour' appears four times.¹⁸

That *The Miller's Tale* effectively 'quites' *The Knight's Tale* by essentially taking the Knight's plot and — by transferring the action from ancient Athens to contemporary Oxford — suppresses the courtly and providential themes in favour of physical facts, has long been accepted.¹⁹ An unremarked aspect of the Miller's parody, however, is this use of the 'kultour' in response to a tale which the Knight has introduced with the self-deprecating half apology: 'I have, God woot, a large feeld to ere, | And wayke been the oxen in my plough.'²⁰ In the Miller's echo of this ploughing motif, then, the Knight's tale-telling is, in effect, rammed up the backside of the sly scholar. Before returning once more to *Till Eulenspiegel*, I would like to draw one more observation from Chaucer's *Miller's Tale*. We have noted the Miller's use of the 'kultour' to add to his undermining of the *Knight's Tale*, yet there is a further dimension to this aggressive appropriation of the plough. Given

¹⁷ Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, I (A) 3785–3812.

¹⁸ James H. Morey, 'The "Cultour" in the *Miller's Tale*: Alison as Iseult', *Chaucer Review*, 29 (1995), 373–81 (p. 375).

¹⁹ See Helen Cooper, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Canterbury Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 103.

²⁰ Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, I (A) 886–87.

the nature of the *fabliau* narrative, it is initially surprising to note the high incidence of biblical allusion within the tale.²¹ Indeed, in his preamble, the Miller defines his tale as, ‘a legende and a lyf | Bothe of a carpenter and of his wyf’,²² suggesting a saint’s narrative — specifically that of St Joseph and the Virgin Mary. The Miller thereby takes on the mantle of one who will, in the words of the later, spurious *Plowman’s Tale*, ‘tell us some holy thyng’,²³ which in the closing years of the fourteenth century and beyond had become the activity so closely associated with the figure of the ploughman in Lollard literature. *The Miller’s Tale* is imbued with references to lay devotional discourse, particularly that of the Mystery Plays — the Miller himself cries out in ‘Pilates voys’, whilst Absolon ‘pleyeth Herodes upon a scaffold hye’ — yet these references are misappropriated and misunderstood.²⁴ If John the carpenter had paid more attention to the play of ‘Noes flood’,²⁵ for example, he would not so easily have been duped by Nicholas. And, ultimately, unlike the version of events so strikingly dramatized in the plays, the carpenter in the Miller’s ‘legende and a lyf’ does not gain spiritual understanding in the wake of his suspicions of his wife’s infidelity. In short, in *The Miller’s Tale*, Chaucer conflates images of lay appropriation of noble and clerical speech, which he satirizes throughout, culminating in the violent application of that traditional analogue of the preacher’s word — the plough — to Nicholas’s behind.²⁶ Thus, we may see these low lay pretensions as — to borrow a phrase from *The Summoner’s Tale* — ‘but of eir reverberacioun’,²⁷ which leads only to pain and chaos. Although it is not entirely impossible that the writer of *Till Eulenspiegel* knew Chaucer’s *Miller’s Tale*, the closest analogue for which is the Middle Dutch *Heile van Beersele*, suggesting a currency of tales along busy trade routes,²⁸ we do not need to make such

²¹ See Lawrence Besserman, *Chaucer and the Bible: A Critical Review of Research, Indexes and Bibliography* (New York: Garland, 1988), pp. 65–71.

²² Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, I (A) 3141–42.

²³ *The Plowman’s Tale*, ed. by Mary Rhinelanders McCarl (New York: Garland, 1997), I. 46.

²⁴ Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, I (A) 3124 and 3384.

²⁵ Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, I (A) 3518.

²⁶ On the allegorization of preaching as ploughing, see Stephen A. Barney, ‘The Plowshare of the Tongue: The Progress of a Symbol from the Bible to *Piers Plowman*’, *Mediaeval Studies*, 35 (1973), 261–93.

²⁷ Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, I (A) 2234.

²⁸ See Peter G. Beidler, ‘Miller’s Tale’, in *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales*, vol. II, ed. by Robert M. Correale and Mary Hamel (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2003), chap. 3.

precise connections in order to hypothesize that they have a common root concern. Indeed, as Oppenheimer notes, the writer, in claiming in chapter 88 that Eulenspiegel has ‘run around every country’, ‘emphasises an international quality, and possibly a humanist’s broad perspective’.²⁹ In one of *Till Eulenspiegel*’s few pointed attacks on specific groups, the narrator begins one of his anecdotes thus:

Eulenspiegel travelled through Bohemia to Prague when he left Marburg. Now, at that time good Christians were still living there — before the days when Wyckliffe brought his heresy from England to Bohemia and it was spread further by John Huss.³⁰

Naturally, in the ensuing debate at the university, in which Eulenspiegel claims to be a great scholar, he gets the better of his interlocutors. This he does, however, not by showing superior knowledge, but by wilfully taking their questions quite literally. When asked how many days have passed since the time of Adam, for example, he confidently answers seven: ‘[a]nd when they’ve passed, then seven more days commence. This process continues till the end of the world’.³¹ Typical of the work as a whole — and again like Chaucer’s *Miller’s Tale* — no explicit moral is drawn from this encounter. Nor is there any overt narrative engagement with matters of heresy or reform. Instead, it merely draws scorn on the heads of those who would claim power for themselves.

These issues I have begun to raise are admittedly diverse, offering allusive echoes rather than firm connections. However, what I hope that these allusions are beginning to suggest is that these examples of — to use Michael Camille’s memorable phrase — ‘anti-language and bodily perversity’ are keying into the broader humanist concerns of the European late Middle Ages.³² N, as Chaucer earlier, is responding to a mood of questioning and reform in which all may participate through the medium of the increasingly powerful vernacular languages of Europe. Yet whilst this vernacular facilitates discussion, debate, empowerment, and social change, both writers are acutely aware that whilst on the one hand it is this process which animates their art, it is also a process which — through the very dynamics of unruly vernaculars — generates misunderstanding, both accidental and, more disturbingly, deliberate. Consequently, N’s apology to readers for the fact that ‘there is in [his] rather plain writing no art or elegance’ may be seen as a statement

²⁹ *Till Eulenspiegel*, ed. and trans. by Oppenheimer, p. xli.

³⁰ *Till Eulenspiegel*, ed. and trans. by Oppenheimer, p. 54.

³¹ *Till Eulenspiegel*, ed. and trans. by Oppenheimer, p. 55.

³² Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (London: Reaktion, 1992), p. 28.

of what we might describe as ‘anti-rhetoric’ — a heightened flourish of writing which paradoxically draws attention to its plainness. In a text which is remarkable in its narrative passages for its ‘[lack of] nearly all conventional figures of speech and rhetoric’,³³ the ‘plain’ vernacular is thereby revealed as the linguistic tool which subverts and unravels learned discourse in all its forms. And, in common with Chaucer’s *Miller’s Tale*, what *Till Eulenspiegel* reveals is the danger that the ultimate ‘end’ (pun intended) of this process is a descent into the ridiculous and worthless — mere excrement.

By way of a telling epilogue; in the nineteenth century, Charles de Coster revisited the stories of *Tyl Ulenspiegel*, removing the scatological aspects and expanding the narrative into a picaresque odyssey, set in the context of the sixteenth-century revolution of seven Low Country provinces against the power of Catholic Spain. Rather than a faeces-fixated troublemaker, de Coster’s protagonist becomes a hero of the Belgian spirit — Belgium having become an independent nation a mere thirty years before the publication of de Coster’s version. Yet within this marked change of emphasis, one detail is added which is perhaps significant to the present discussion. When still a feckless youth in his home town of Damme, we are told that Ulenspiegel:

learned from a master mason how to carve wood and stone when the man came to carve a stall in the Church of Our Lady; a stall so constructed that, when it was necessary, the aged Dean could sit down in it and yet have the appearance of standing up.³⁴

Although the young Ulenspiegel adheres to no trade, de Coster — alluding to the cultural climate which gave rise to his protagonist — perceptively has him trained by a carver of misericords. And what, if this had been the case, may such a character have carved around the beginning of the sixteenth century?

Clearly, we may expect some graphic pun upon his name, and we may occasionally see carvers having left such a symbol, explicitly influenced by tales circulating in the late medieval period, as on an arm rest in Kempen. He may also have carved representations of his exploits, as we can see in Paris, Saint-Gervais-Saint-Protais (Figure 39), where we find a scene which, although unlike the woodcut of the episode in early printed books, is very much in the manner of chapter 76 of *Till Eulenspiegel*, in which he blows the smell of his excrement into a house where he has been excluded from a banquet. Furthermore, I would like to suggest that, given

³³ *Till Eulenspiegel*, ed. and trans. by Oppenheimer, p. xxxiii.

³⁴ Charles de Coster, *The Glorious Adventures of Tyl Ulenspiegel*, trans. by Camille Huysmans (New York: Pantheon, 1943), p. 44.



Figure 39. Misericord, Saint-Gervais-Saint-Protais, Paris. Photo by Paul Hardwick.

his love of linguistic trickery, he may well have carved images like that at Walcourt with which we began, picking up the pun of the mirror/ar-se-wiping.

Why, though, would such an image be considered appropriate for inclusion in church decoration? As Jeff Persels has shown, by the mid-sixteenth century, ‘the rhetoric of elimination and purgation, oral and anal’ was being employed very deliberately and pointedly in Reformist discourse,³⁵ so it is particularly perplexing to see such an image appearing only slightly earlier in the Walcourt choir. I would suggest that the carving responds to the concern with language — and its potential degeneration into wind and excrement — which has been suggested during the course of this essay. Valerie Allen has persuasively argued that, rather than viewing references — both textual and visual — to anal expulsions in terms of repression and rebellion, ‘we might do better to align medieval farts [and excrement] with a

³⁵ Jeff Persels, “‘The Mass and the Fart Are Sisters’: Scatology and Calvinist Rhetoric against the Mass, 1560–63”, in *Fecal Matters in Early Modern Literature*, ed. by Persels and Ganim, pp. 38–55. See also Glenn Ehrstine, ‘Foollectomies, Fool Enemas, and the Renaissance Anatomy of Folly’, in *ibid.*, pp. 96–108.

discourse of holiness and corruption',³⁶ and I believe that, in a period during which 'Wyckliffe brought his heresy from England to Bohemia and it was spread further by John Huss',³⁷ we may discern in the Walcourt image a deprecation of the pretensions of the vernacular to engage with matters of doctrine which lead to the corruption of holiness. If this is the case, may this also explain the proliferation elsewhere of figures defecating or displaying a graphically opened anus, almost certainly farting?³⁸ Indeed, should we perhaps bring this to bear upon other images of figures who gesture to their backsides, such as the moon-faced monk gripping his thighs below bared buttocks at Chezal-Benoît (Cher)? At the extreme end of the spectrum, we even find animals, such as the ape in Saint-Illide (Cantal), which pays no attention to what looks like a book in its left hand,³⁹ whilst gesturing to its backside with its right.

Whilst broad rather than deep, I hope that in this essay I have offered a persuasive case for looking again at the proliferation of images of lower bodily functions in the art and literature of late medieval Europe. Rather than representing mere scurrilous humour — or even subversion — I believe further study may make a strong case for their representing a reactionary response to the cultural inroads made by unstable vernacular languages. And if they 'put [anyone] in a bad mood or embarrass anyone', I believe those thus offended may well be exactly the people who are targeted — those who are attempting to appropriate clerical learning which is perceived as being beyond them and, consequently, whose 'speech is not worth a farte',⁴⁰ and who are, in modern parlance, 'talking shit'.

³⁶ Valerie Allen, *On Farting: Language and Laughter in the Middle Ages* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 17.

³⁷ *Till Eulenspiegel*, ed. and trans. by Oppenheimer, p. 54.

³⁸ Such images — sometimes referred to as acrobats — are common throughout Europe. A particularly fine example is to be found at Vence, Ancienne Cathédrale (Alpes-Maritime).

³⁹ It has been suggested that the object held by the ape is a weight: Elaine C. Block, *Corpus of Medieval Misericords: France* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), p. 35. Whilst apes are indeed often depicted chained to weights, suggesting their entrapment with earthly things, the object in this case closely resembles a horn book.

⁴⁰ Balaack to Balaham in *The Chester Mystery Cycle*, ed. by R. M. Lumiansky and David Mills, EETS s.s., 3 (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 91.

SIDEWAYS: FACE-PLAY ON THE EDGE OF SOME SCOTTISH POT-QUERNS, OR A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE ABBEY

M. A. Hall

The men of the Middle Ages participated in two lives: the official and the carnival life. Two aspects of the world, the serious and the laughing [...] co-existed in their consciousness.¹

Introduction

This chapter ranges either side of the Middle Ages (exploring its margins) but is principally focused on the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries, the suggested date range of the group of querns/mortars bearing face-masks/heads. My encounter with this material began in 1997 when what proved to be a probably post-medieval example from Braco, Perthshire (catalogue no. 1 below) was brought into Perth Museum for identification and subsequent donation to the collection. Initially I speculated on its being medieval, with the Drummond coat of arms and accompanying 1708 date added later (cf. the medieval

Elaine's departure to catalogue angelic misericords has perforce changed an affectionate tribute to a colleague into a lament for a much missed one; she remains the underpinning inspiration for this paper. Many thanks to Paul Hardwick for inviting my contribution and to numerous colleagues for supplying information, advice, and comment: I. G. Scott, Derek Hall, Richard Fawcett, David Addison, Niall Robertson, Annemarieke Willemsen, David Caldwell, Andrew Heald, Fraser Hunter, Rev. Donald MacEwan, Hugh Morrison, Mary Márkus, and Michelle Anderson. Last but not least the whole episode was set in motion by Messrs Kelly and Mackenzie who showed me the Braco example and by Mr Mackenzie's subsequent donation of it to Perth Museum.

¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. by Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), p. 96.

domestic mortar from Builth, Wales, to which the date 1716 was later added).² Whilst this remains a possibility, the Braco pot-quern does appear to have an integrity that speaks of its creation in the early eighteenth century. The face-mask on the side of the pot-quern, though clearly in a medieval tradition, is also part of a longer tradition that is generally characterized as the Celtic stone head phenomenon, widely attested, for example, in north Britain in the post-medieval period.³ A close analogy for the Braco face-quern and also from Perthshire is the Celtic-style heads on the skewputs of a now ruinous, late seventeenth-century (remodelled in the eighteenth) house at Old Mains of Rattray.⁴ However, thus far I have only been able to find parallels to the Braco face-quern from medieval sites across Scotland (but including one Roman site, rather ironically, Ardoch Roman fort, Braco). This also extends to some of the features of the head, such as the arms (see catalogue no. 1 below), comparable to those on a corbel head from the late fifteenth-century sacristy of Crossraguel Abbey.⁵ My search for parallels in Scotland has been extensive but not exhaustive in terms of the rest of the United Kingdom or Europe. In England the major medieval urban excavations in London, York, Winchester, Exeter, and Southampton, the rich collection from Salisbury, and ecclesiastical excavations in Bristol and Leicester have produced a range of mortars and querns but nothing directly comparable in terms of octagonal forms bearing human face-masks.⁶ A recent, serendipitous study-trip to France chanced upon a very close

² Anonymous, 'Medieval Domestic Mortars Used as Holy Water Stoups in Churches', *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 6th ser., 1 (1901), 153–55.

³ Peter Brears, *North Country Folk Art* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1989), pp. 32–44.

⁴ Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, *South East Perth: An Archaeological Landscape* (Edinburgh: RCAHMS, 1994), pp. 142–43, illus. 143c.

⁵ Richard Fawcett, *Scottish Abbeys and Priors* (London: Batsford, 1994), p. 86; and see Figure 46 below.

⁶ The material from London awaits publication. For Winchester, see S. E. Ellis and R. W. Sanderson, 'The Querns' and 'The Mortars', in *Object and Economy in Medieval Winchester*, ed. by Martin Biddle, Winchester Studies, 7 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), I, 292–96 and 296–98; for York, see Patrick Ottaway and Nicola Rogers, *Craft Industry and Everyday Life: Finds from Medieval York*, Archaeology of York: The Small Finds, 17/15 (York: Council for British Archaeology, 2002); for Exeter, see John P. Allen, *Medieval and Post-Medieval Finds from Exeter 1971–80*, Exeter Archaeological Reports, 3 (Exeter: Exeter City Council and University of Exeter, 1984); for Southampton, see *Excavations in Medieval Southampton 1953–69*, ed. by Colin Platt and R. Coleman-Smith, 2 vols (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1975), II: *The Finds*; for Salisbury, see *Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum Medieval Catalogue Part 1*, ed. by Peter Saunders and Elizabeth Saunders (Salisbury: Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum, 1991); for Bristol, see

comparison. In Normandy, some of the scant remains of the cathedral of Avranches are on display in the city museum (itself part of the former Bishop's Palace), including an octagonal, granite mortar decorated with two face-masks either side of a plain, triangular chute-opening, exiting from the bowl. It seems inherently unlikely to be the only comparable example from the Continent. The following catalogue, then, is provisional and far from comprehensive, but I offer it as a sufficient sample on which to hang the discussion that follows it. This looks at their possible contexts of use and the decorative context of face-masks and explores their capacity to tell us about the medieval sense of humour, not as an isolated cultural idiom but as something fully integrated with its cultural contexts.

Catalogue

This brief catalogue lists only the extant Scottish material known to the author. The listing is in arbitrary numerical order, sub-divided by local authority areas. See Map 1 for a map of the places listed.

Perth and Kinross

1. Braco (Figure 40)

Provenance and description: A casual find in garden soil at Keir Cottage, Braco, in the mid 1990s, this quern/mortar is of sandstone and was found in two pieces.

Height: 210mm; maximum diameter (with head): 315mm; internal diameter: 192mm.

The quern has an octagonal form, with one of its facets bearing a protruding, relief Celtic-style head — this face-mask-bearing facet was found as a detached piece. The inner area or bowl of the quern is circular and has the remains of a central pivot on which an upper stone would have sat and rotated in a grinding motion. Within the bowl, placed just behind the back of the head/face-mask, a small hole opens up which exits through the nose of the face-mask. The face has lentoid eyes, with lids and eye sockets, a flattish, flaring nose, and a small mouth.

R. Price and M. Ponsford, *St Bartholomew's Hospital, Bristol: The Excavation of a Medieval Hospital 1976–78*, CBA Research Report, 110 (York: Council for British Archaeology, 1998); and for Leicester, see Jean E. Mellor and T. Pearce, *The Austin Friars, Leicester*, CBA Research Report, 35 (London: Council for British Archaeology, 1981).



Map 1. Map of Scottish sites mentioned in the text. Drawn by M. A. Hall.



Figure 40. The Braco face-quern, Perth. Photography by Paul Adair, courtesy of and © Perth Museum & Art Gallery.

It has indications of hair and a beard and two small arms with forearms springing from the sides of the bowl and holding the base of the head. Running around the remaining facets of the octagon, from right to left, are the initials I D (presumably for James Drummond), the Drummond coat of arms (three bars wavy, in this case set against an elaborate shield design), and the date 1708. The shield also bears, below the wavy bars, what appears to be a label, only upside-down (like an E on its back) — the opposite of normal usage. If it is a label — a device used to indicate the eldest son — it would fit in with the I initial for James and the date 1708: James Drummond, the third Earl, died in 1716 and was succeeded by his eldest son James. At some stage before burial in the garden the quern had been over-painted in a modern lead paint (mostly decayed), possibly for an appropriated reuse as a garden ornament or birdbath. The quern/mortar presumably started life as a piece of kitchen equipment at the main residence of the Drummonds, Drummond

Castle (approx. 9 miles to the north of Braco).⁷ They were the major landowners in the vicinity.⁸

Location: Perth Museum & Art Gallery (accession number 1997.256).

2. *Ardoch (by Braco)*

Provenance and description: Excavations at the Roman fort of Ardoch in 1896–97 recovered this rim fragment of a probable mortar (certainly a heavy stone vessel). It measures 70x110x60mm and is made of a local buff sandstone.⁹ A human face-mask has been incised just below the rim. Its relatively small size suggests the complete vessel may have borne several of these. One of the fragment break lines cuts across the face-mask, removing the chin. Otherwise the face is slightly elongated with two irregularly rounded eyes, a simple straight nose, domed head, and a small, round open mouth. In general such face-masks/heads have been seen as characteristically Celtic and comparable to heads on pre-Roman and Roman Iron Age pottery.¹⁰ Little in the way of contextual information was recorded in the finds report or the wider excavation reports, and it is impossible to say which part of the excavation recovered the fragment.¹¹ It is worth noting that the excavations revealed part of the former medieval chapel built over the praetorium.¹² The

⁷ Nick Haynes, *Perth and Kinross: An Illustrated Architectural Guide* (Edinburgh: Rutland Press, 2000), pp. 92–93.

⁸ A. H. Anderson, *Sketches of Ardoch* (Braco: James Forbes, [n.d.]); D. J. McIlldowie, *The Parish of Ardoch and the Village of Braco* (Braco: [n.pub.], 1981).

⁹ Joseph Anderson, 'Excavations at the Roman Site at Ardoch III: Notices of the Bronze and Other Articles Discovered During the Excavations', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 32 (1897–98), 453–71 (p. 467); Lawrence J. F. Keppie and B. S. Arnold, *Corpus signorum Imperii Romani – Corpus of Sculpture of the Roman World: Great Britain*, vol. 1.4: *Scotland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), cat. 166 and pl. 40.

¹⁰ A good local example is the boulder carved with four heads now in Perth Museum but found in Abernethy, see Edwina Proudfoot, 'Abernethy and Mugdrum: Towards Reassessment', in *The Worm, the Germ and the Thorn: Pictish and Related Studies Presented to Isabel Henderson*, ed. by David Henry (Balgavies: Pinkfoot, 1997), pp. 47–63 (p. 59 and pl. 18).

¹¹ For the finds, see Anderson, 'Excavations at the Roman Site at Ardoch III'; for the excavations, see J. H. Cunningham, 'Account of the Excavations and Description of the Plan and Interior Structures', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 32 (1897–98), 436–52, and T. Ross, 'Notice of the Remains of a Medieval Chapel found in the Roman Station at Ardoch', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 32 (1897–98), 471–76.

¹² Ross, 'Notice of the Remains of a Medieval Chapel'.



Figure 41. The Aberargie face-quern, Aberargie. Photography by M. A. Hall, courtesy of Trustees of the National Museum of Scotland.

absence of precise details perhaps makes it easier to suggest that the face-bearing fragment was found and curated (because it bears a face) in the post-Roman period. The chapel was originally known as Chapel Raith and may be no older than the fourteenth century, though circumstantially the political landscape around Ardoch could support an early medieval date.¹³

Location: National Museum of Scotland (registration number FQ188).

3. *Aberargie, Abernethy (Figure 41)*

Provenance and description: The known details of this quern simply record that it comes from Aberargie and that it was donated to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland in 1868, by local (Newburgh, Fife) antiquarian Alexander Laing.

Height: 200mm; maximum diameter (with head): *c.* 380mm; internal diameter: 230mm.

¹³ Angus Watson, 'Place-names, Land and Lordship in the Medieval Earldom of Strathearn' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of St Andrews, 2002), pp. 354, 373–74, and 567–68.

This quern is octagonal in shape and with severe damage to the rim, which is broken away around four sides. It has a shallow, flat-bottomed basin with a central pivot hole. What appears to have been a face-mask has been substantially removed, deliberately or otherwise. The basic oval outline of a face/head remains, but there are no features. The 'mouth' exit hole is clear, its chute running back to its opening in the quernstone-basin. The quern is a further puzzle in boasting a second hole. The rim above the 'head' projects outwards, creating a kind of hood effect for the 'head'. Through this rim is cut the second hole, with its secondary chute exiting above the 'mouth' hole. It is difficult to account for this arrangement beyond a vague notion of a secondary adaptation for some other use. A tentative suggested date range is sixteenth to eighteenth century.

Current location: National Museum of Scotland (registration number BB72).

Fife

4. St Monance (Figure 42)

Provenance and description: At St Monance parish church is a red sandstone pot-quern, which can be traced back with certainty some sixty years, but there is no record of where precisely it was found.

Height: 150mm; maximum diameter (with head): 390mm; internal diameter: 245mm.

The quern is of rounded/circular form, except where it swells to accommodate the protruding, relief-carved Celtic-style head on its side. The base is roughly smoothed off. Its condition, with its dark stains and lichen growth, implies a long spell spent outside. It has a shallow, circular, flat-bottomed inner bowl, with a centrally placed pivot hole to receive a top-stone. A hole opens up just behind the back of the head by which the contents of the bowl were channelled to exit through the mouth opening. This exit chute is of rectangular cross-section. There is damage around the mouth and the right eyebrow, and a fragment to the left of the head has been lost. The head has typical, so-called Celtic features with perfunctorily lentoid eyes and a long, flaring nose. There is a suggestion of flattened, curly hair on the top of the head. The sides of the quern are roughly finished but with some possibly deliberate dimpling. The quern may be fifteenth century in date. St Monance church was a royal foundation of the fourteenth century and later became a Dominican friary. The ruin of the late medieval Newark castle stands on the cliffs a quarter mile to the south.

Location: On the sedilia inside St Monance church.



Figure 42. The St Monance face-quern, Fife. Photography by M. A. Hall.

5. Kinloss Farm, Cupar (Figure 43)

Provenance and description: Currently at Kinloss Farm, Kinloss House, this quern is said to have been found in the field occupied by the old parish church of Cupar, St Christopher's.¹⁴

Height: 215mm; maximum diameter (with head): 480mm; internal diameter: 370mm.

A large sandstone pot-quern, lacking its upper stone. Its form is octagonal and there are two side lugs to facilitate carrying and lifting. The interior bowl is round with a hole placed behind the back of the protruding head that occupies one of the exterior facets. The hole (now blocked with soil and mortar) exits through a wide-open mouth of a gargoyle-like grotesque face with a protruding tongue. The face has bulbous cheeks, a short, squat nose, and round, hooded eyes. The whole face-

¹⁴ Derek Hall and Michael King, 'Field Survey and Assessment at the Former Site of St Christopher's Parish Church, Cupar', *Tayside and Fife Archaeological Journal*, 5 (1999), 72–86 (p. 75).



Figure 43. The Cupar (St Christopher's) face-quern, Fife. Photography by M. A. Hall.

mask is cut back into its facet, giving it the appearance of being hooded.¹⁵ There is a central pivot hole plugged with lead and with a fragment of iron protruding. Either side of this hole are two further leaded holes from each of which corroded iron strap-work, each perforated with three holes, protrudes and overlaps. Two further leaded holes preserve remnants of cast iron railing heads (in line with traces of railing across the top of the rest of the wall — presumably recovered as part of the war effort during World War II).

Location: The quern is currently mortared onto the western boundary wall of Kinloss Farm (along with other masonry seemingly from the Kirk, including a probable aumbry), which is adjacent to the site of the former parish church of St Christopher's.

¹⁵ Hall and King, 'Field Survey and Assessment', illus. 6 and p. 85.



Figure 44. The Ayr (St John's) face-quern, Ayr. Photography by M. A. Hall.

Ayrshire

6. Ayr (Figure 44)

Provenance and description: This quern has been recorded in the tower of the former St John Baptist parish church, Ayr, since at least the end of the nineteenth century and will be published shortly in a review of the archaeology of Ayr.¹⁶

Height: 200mm; maximum diameter (with head): 450mm; internal diameter: 300mm.

A grey sandstone octagonal quern/mortar with an inner flat-bottomed, round bowl. The upper stone is missing, but the central pivot hole is clear (and unleaded). All the exterior facets are plain except for that bearing the protruding, relief-carved face-mask. The face is long and narrow with a protruding nose and lentoid eyes

¹⁶ J. A. Morris 'The Church of St John the Baptist, Ayr', *Transactions of the Scottish Ecclesiological Society*, 3 (1911–12), 331–42; David Perry, 'Excavations in the Medieval Burgh of Ayr between 1984 and 1987' (forthcoming).

(with pronounced eyeballs in deep sockets). Well-defined straight hair falls below the ears and ends in tight curls. This is very similar to styles of royal portraiture on coins and architectural embellishments, but it lacks a crown and any tokens of office. A clearly defined tongue is visible in an oval, open mouth. The tongue extends to the back of the throat; that is, to the exit hole in the inner bowl, which opens behind the head. The base of the quern has been given a dressed finish. Several of the exterior facets and the rim have chipped damage. Morris seems to have been the first to record the quern, noting its thirteenth-century character and the traditions attached to it of use as a font and/or a holy water stoup.¹⁷ He correctly infers its original purpose as a quern (for grain).

Location: Rozelle House Galleries, Ayr (part of South Ayrshire Museums and Galleries Service).

7. Crossraguel Abbey, Maybole (Figure 45)

Provenance and description: Amongst the loose medieval stonework of Crossraguel Abbey is this sandstone octagonal quern. The abbey was a Cluniac house founded in the thirteenth century.¹⁸

Height: 170mm; external diameter: 360mm (400mm with mask); internal diameter: 280mm.

It has a well-shaped octagonal exterior with a circular, flat-bottomed inner bowl, which has been worn smooth. Approximately half of the rim has been removed by damage or deliberate, crude refashioning to serve some subsequent purpose. There is a central pivot hole in the bowl, which has been enlarged and penetrates all the way through the stone and has a rectangular section. A hole placed behind the back of the face-mask exits through the mouth of the same face-mask, relief-carved on one of the facets of the octagon. The mouth is flaring and has a faintly heart-shaped profile. The details of the face are badly worn, implying a long period of exposure to the elements. The eyes are still discernible, but the nose has been removed. There is a faint suggestion of hair or head-gear. The abbey is well preserved, especially the sacristy, the corbels of which are decorated with various heads, including a simplified and amusing example with arms extending from the sides of the head to meet with interlocking fingers across the mouth (Figure 46) and a somewhat more broody triple-faced, so Trinitarian (?) example

¹⁷ Morris, 'Church of St John the Baptist, Ayr', pp. 340–41.

¹⁸ Ian B. Cowan and David E. Easson, *Medieval Religious Houses: Scotland*, 2nd edn (London: Longman, 1976), pp. 63–64; C. A. Raleigh Radford, *Crossraguel Abbey*, rev. edn (Edinburgh: Historic Scotland, 1995).



Figure 45. The Crossraguel Abbey face-quern, Maybole.
Photography by M. A. Hall, courtesy of Historic Scotland.



Figure 46. The Crossraguel Abbey sacristy corbel head, Maybole.
Courtesy of and © Historic Scotland.

(Figure 47).¹⁹ Also on display, in a room off the slype passage, is a larger, crude, plain stone basin.

Location: On display in the gatehouse of Crossraguel Abbey (Historic Scotland property in care).

Dumfries and Galloway

8. Glenluce Abbey, Glenluce, nr. Stranraer (Figure 48)

Provenance and description: From amongst the loose medieval stonework of Glenluce Abbey comes this sandstone, irregularly rounded face-mortar. The abbey was a Cistercian house founded in 1191/92 and finally secularized in 1602.²⁰

Height: 280mm; maximum external diameter: 410mm; internal diameter: 295mm; depth of bowl: 200mm.

Of the objects catalogued in this paper this seems the most readily classifiable as a mortar. It has a deep, round, hemispherical bowl, with a well-ground smooth finish. There is no pivot hole, but there is an exit hole channelling to the mouth of the face-mask. The hole opens up high on the inner face of the bowl, which would seem to make the expulsion of the mortared contents of the bowl difficult. The crudely rounded exterior is irregularly faceted, and swellings down the side may have been handle-lugs. The protruding face-mask is of elongated oval form with a squareish, slot-like mouth, cut back to suggest an open, deep mouth. The nose has been damaged, and there are also breaks in the rim. The eye sockets are round and deeply drilled. In places there are deep cracks, repaired, suggesting that on some previous occasion the mortar was broken into several pieces. It is currently described on site as a stoup or water trough and given a late fifteenth-century date.

¹⁹ It is France again that provides several close comparators for such triple faces, which were clearly a common element of medieval church marginal decoration. In Bayeux Cathedral the north and south sides of the nave each have one pillar-corbel carved with triple-heads. As a motif deployed to decorate misericords it occurs (sometimes more than once) in at least sixteen sets scattered across France, including St Pol-de-Léon (Finistère), St Jean-de-Maurienne (Savoie), and St Thiebaut, Thann (Haut-Rhin). The motif is variously interpreted as a parody of Prudence, as the three ages of man, as three continents, as three races, or as an anti-Trinity or Antichrist. See Elaine Block, *Corpus of Medieval Misericords: France* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), pp. 63 and 285, pl. B2 (St Pol-de-Léon); 134 and 371, pl. A2 (St Jean-de-Maurienne), and 125–26 and 30, pl. A2. For other examples, see the iconographic index, p. 229.

²⁰ Cowan and Easson, *Medieval Religious Houses: Scotland*, p. 75; Doreen Grove, *Glenluce Abbey* (Edinburgh: Historic Scotland, 1996).



Figure 47. The Crossraguel Abbey sacristy corbel triple face-mask, Maybole.
Courtesy of and © Historic Scotland.



Figure 48. The Glenluce abbey face-mortar. Courtesy of and © Historic Scotland.

It does not appear to have been previously published and was presumably extant before Stuart Cruden's excavations (i.e. not recovered by them), as it does not appear in the finds reports.²¹ Although a Cistercian house, it displays some other, very fine, animal and human face-masks (some of them foliate) used in ceiling bosses, corbels, and doorway decoration of the early sixteenth-century chapter house.

Location: On display in the museum at Glenluce Abbey (Historic Scotland property in care).

²¹ Stewart Cruden, 'Glenluce Abbey: Finds Recovered During Excavations. Part I', *Transactions of the Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society*, 29 (1950–51), 177–94; and Cruden, 'Glenluce Abbey: Finds Recovered During Excavation. Part II', *Transactions of the Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society*, 30 (1951–52), 179–90.

Highland

9. *Inverness*

Provenance and description: Trial excavation and watching brief in 1985–86 at 17–33 Friars Street recorded a pit containing mainly dumped architectural fragments and the pot-quern described here.²² The published drawing indicates a coarse-grained stone, possibly sandstone. The friary was a Dominican house founded in the thirteenth century and ruinous by 1436; it was disbanded in 1556/57.²³

Height: 220mm; maximum diameter (with head): 440mm; internal diameter: 268mm.

The quern is of circular form with a protruding face-mask running the full height of the quern. The shallow, internal, flat-bottomed bowl has a central metal pivot with lead fixing, to hold the no longer extant upper stone. A hole cut on the edge of the bowl runs through the head, exiting through a round, flaring mouth with thickened lips. The nose is thick and flares out to meet the upper lip, on which it rests. A brow-line is indicated and two large, well-delineated, asymmetrically lentoid eyes. There are two well-delineated ears of reverse C-shape form.

Location: Inverness Museum & Art Gallery.

Moray

10. *Elgin (Figure 49)*

Provenance and description: Of long association with Elgin Cathedral, it was donated in 1905 by the Cathedral College to Elgin Museum, on the basis that it was a piscina. The Moray bishopric was in existence by the early twelfth century, but the seat was not fixed in Elgin until 1224.²⁴

Height: 240mm (approx.); length: 415mm; width: 365mm; internal diameter: 225mm (approx.).

Whilst this is not so well finished overall it still has the integrity of a freestanding 'vessel' and it is clearly not a piscina. It is sandstone with a crudely octagonal exterior and a round, internal bowl with a hole that exits through a triangular,

²² David Perry, 'Inverness: An Historical and Archaeological Review', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 128 (1998), 831–57, no. 11 and illus. 8.

²³ Cowan and Easson, *Medieval Religious Houses: Scotland*, p. 119.

²⁴ Cowan and Easson, *Medieval Religious Houses: Scotland*, pp. 206–07.

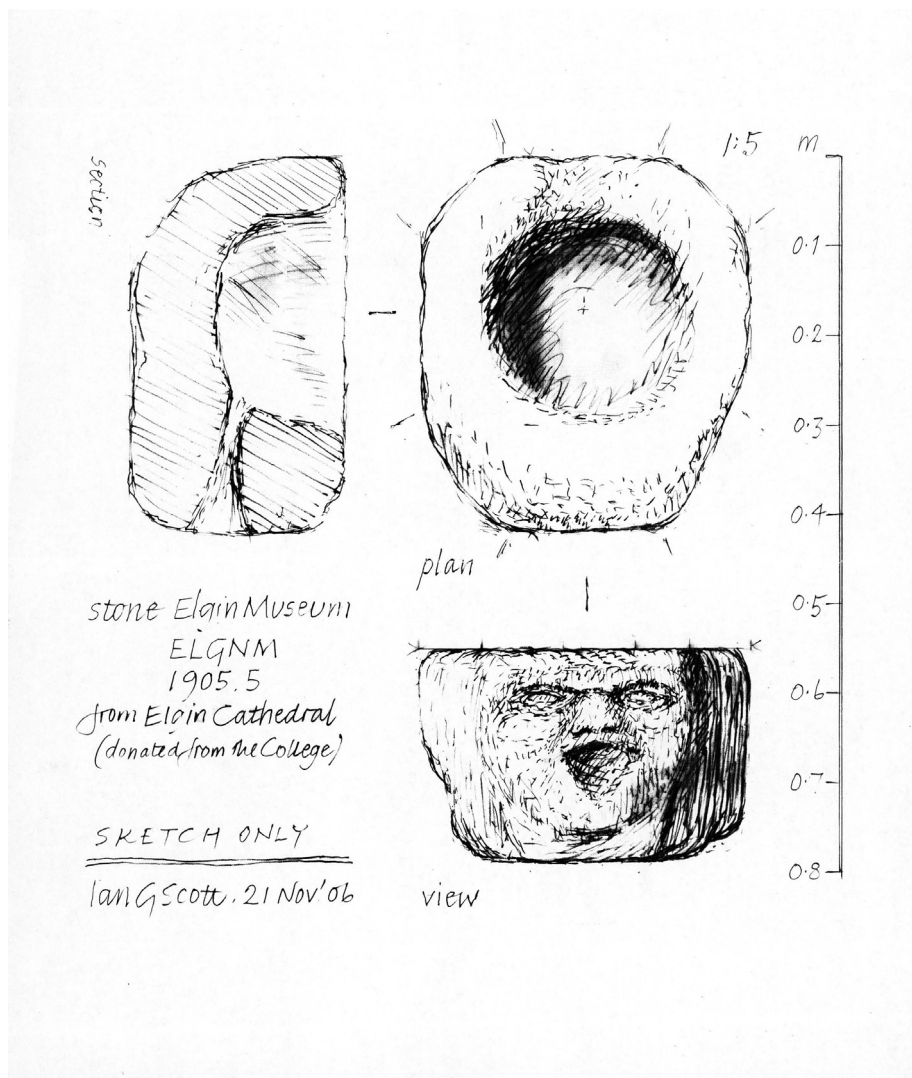


Figure 49. The Elgin Cathedral face-quern, Moray. Drawing by and © I. G. Scott.

flaring mouth with no lip definition. The face-mask occupies the full space of the facet. A pair of lentoid eyes are defined with pupils and sockets, and the eyes are linked by a single, arching incision at the top of the nose — an accurate reflection of furrowing attendant on a wide-open mouth expression (such as laughter). A short, stubby nose is clearly defined with two nostril holes. The back and left side



Figure 50. The Gladsmuir face-quern. Photography by M. A. Hall and courtesy of Trustees of the National Museum of Scotland.

appear heavily abraded and damaged. A swelling on the left suggests it may have had lug handles.

Current location: Elgin Museum.

East Lothian

11. Gladsmuir, near Haddington (Figure 50)

Provenance and description: Found on the farm of Westbank, Gladsmuir parish and donated to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland collection (now National Museum of Scotland) in the mid-nineteenth century. Made from a conglomerate or coarse pudding stone.

Height: 210mm; maximum diameter (with head): 440mm; internal diameter: 315mm; diameter of topstone: *c.* 310mm.

This is a round pot-quern and is unique in having its top grinding stone. It bears a rather serene-looking face-mask with what appear to be fully closed eyes,

shown as round balls within broad sockets. The nose is flattish and flaring. A thick moustache fills the space between nose and upper lip of a slightly pursed mouth. The top of the mask is flush with the rim of the quern and extends almost the full length of the quern-side. The space between the chin of the mask and the bottom edge of the quern is filled by an opening for the exit chute from the bowl which, not being part of the face-mask, adds to the serene death-mask quality of the face-mask. The exit hole for the inner basin/bowl opens beneath the face-mask. Possible opposed handle holes on the sides. Probably post-medieval. It was described and illustrated by Wilson who also notes: 'The iron ring now fastened to it is a modern addition of its last possessor, who used it for securing his horse at the farm house door.'²⁵

Location: National Museum of Scotland (registration number X.BB 49–50).

Discussion

Having laid out the evidence I now turn to its interpretative possibilities. The humorous feasibility and capacity of the various pot-querns under discussion, particularly their punning reflex, have seemed to me self-evident from my first encounters with them. The material is also significant in other ways pertaining to their function and cultural symbolism. I will explore these — the background story — first, not least because they give a fuller context of human agency, thus helping us to understand their humorous potential, before concluding with the punchline.

Of Querns and Mortars

Mortars and querns are a rather ubiquitous and prosaic element of the archaeological record. They share grinding and pounding actions for the breaking-up of predominantly foodstuffs (see below), with mortars usually used for a wide range of consumables and querns generally defined as for grinding grains. When querns reach a much larger size they become millstones, and the more diminutive querns are also known as handmills. In discussion, the term 'quern' tends to be applied interchangeably to either of the stones in a pair or to the pairing, but Anglo-Saxon

²⁵ Daniel Wilson, *Prehistoric Annals of Scotland*, 2nd edn, 2 vols (London: MacMillan, 1863), I, 213–14, fig. 31, quote at p. 214. See also Armand D. Lacaille, 'Stone Basins (Some Examples from the West of Scotland as Guides to Typology)', *Transactions of the Glasgow Archaeological Society*, 12 (1953), 41–93 (p. 55).

texts are interpreted as meaning that the upper, rotary stone was the *curynstan*, including a reference to its continuous motion.²⁶ Pot-querns are perhaps best seen as a hybrid form in which the lower stone is scooped out with a bowl in which the upper stone sits. The term 'pot' is not a reference to pottery/ceramic but derives from the generic term 'pot' for food-preparation vessels (ultimately derived from ceramic cooking pots but in its abbreviated form more widely applied to vessels in other media). Whilst querns in particular have always been recognized for their ability to inform about farming and dietary practices and their social contexts,²⁷ their changing styles have been readily seized upon by archaeologists as broad chronological markers.²⁸ All classes of rotary quern have most recently had their medieval development (based primarily on English evidence) outlined by Watts.²⁹ All remain indebted to the pioneering approach of Cecil Curwen who set out an evolutionary outline of the development of querns in Britain in his 1937 paper for *Antiquity*, with its concern for the prosaic and the everyday. Following Pitt-Rivers, Curwen noted that

It is the common objects that are often more important than the rare ones, just because they are common and it is surely one of the prime objects of excavation to provide data for the study of the evolution, not only of pottery, but of all common objects.³⁰

The chronological understanding of everyday objects remains of key importance for an appreciation of the complex evolutionary trajectory of human culture, but

²⁶ Ann Hagen, *A Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Food Processing and Consumption* (Pinner: Anglo-Saxon Books, 1992), p. 4.

²⁷ For example see Hagen, *Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Food*, who notes gender implications from an Anglo-Saxon law code which lists a class of female slaves that has the task of grinding corn.

²⁸ For example, see Peter J. Fowler, *The Farming of Prehistoric Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), and Fowler, *Farming in the First Millennium AD: British Agriculture Between Julius Caesar and William the Conqueror* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). For the Scottish archaeological context, see for example, Euan W. Mackie, 'Some New Quernstones from Brochs and Duns', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 104 (1972), 137–46; and for the Scottish post-medieval ethnology, see Alexander Fenton, *Scottish Country Life* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1976), pp. 99–102. For some specific later medieval examples, focusing on chronology and distribution, see Gerald C. Dunning, 'Stone Mortars', in John G. Hurst, 'The Kitchen Area of Northolt Manor, Middlesex', *Medieval Archaeology*, 5 (1965), 211–99 (pp. 279–84), and Ellis and Sanderson, 'The Querns' and 'The Mortars'.

²⁹ Susan Watts, 'Rotary Querns c. 700–1700', in *Finds Research Group AD 700–1700: Datasheet 38* (Sheffield: Finds Research Group, 2006), pp. 1–6.

³⁰ E. Cecil Curwen, 'Querns', *Antiquity*, 11 (1937), 133–51 (p. 133).

it is not the chief concern of this paper and I now turn to consider two other, interrelated facets of that culture: the symbolic and human values that resided in everyday material culture, in particular the querns in question here, and the function and provisional distribution pattern of those same querns.

Distribution and Use

In addition to the eleven face-querns/mortars catalogued above I am aware of two presumably lost examples (or more accurately a possibly lost example and a lost possible example), a possible example, and a fourth related example. The possibly lost example was recorded at St Andrews Cathedral in the early twentieth century as being comparable to the example from Ayr (catalogue no. 6 above).³¹ The lost possible example was recorded by the Rev. Wilson in his account for the *Statistical Account* published in 1845 as being from King's Well, Balchuinnie, Abernyste: 'The writer of this account found here, at the manse, what seems to have been in ancient times a baptismal font, an old octagon of hewn stone, perforated in the bottom, to emit the water occasionally.'³² It may well be that this was a reused font, but it has also an echo of a pot-quern/mortar, and although there is no mention by Wilson of a face-mask, the association of such heads, or the 'Old Man's Face' as they were known, with spring sites is a common one.³³ The possible example survives as a fragment recovered by excavation at the Carmelite friary in Linlithgow.³⁴ Much of the bowl survives and with enough parts of some of the facets to infer an octagonal design. No evidence for a face-mask survives, but the bowl form invites comparison with catalogue no. 8, Glenluce. The related example is octagonal and currently in use as a baptismal font in the chapel of Stobhall Castle, Perthshire. The exit hole is not through the mouth of a face-mask but through the genitalia of a sheela na gig, which decorates one facet. Though published as a font, Richard Fawcett (pers.

³¹ Morris, 'Church of St John the Baptist, Ayr', p. 341.

³² Rev. James Wilson, 'Parish of Abernyste (1837)', in *The Statistical Account of Perthshire* (Edinburgh: Blackwood and Sons, 1844), pp. 219–27 (p. 222).

³³ See Brears, *North Country Folk Art*, fig. 18, for several Yorkshire examples.

³⁴ *Three Scottish Carmelite Friaries: Excavations at Aberdeen, Linlithgow and Perth 1980–86*, ed. by Judith Stones, Monograph No. 6 (Edinburgh: Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, 1989), p. 146 and ill. 90; the friary was founded c. 1401 and secularized c. 1556–57; see Cowan and Easson, *Medieval Religious Houses: Scotland*, p. 137.

comm.) assures me that his examination of it left him in no doubt that it was a reused mortar/quern.³⁵

There is a noticeable, near unanimous association of this group of medieval querns with ecclesiastical sites. Monastic establishments in particular (but also cathedral canons) certainly required an array of querns, millstones, and mortars for the grinding of foodstuffs and other materials (see for example the Whithorn assemblage).³⁶ The one exception is, as found, the example from Inverness, though it is conceivable that it had a medieval ecclesiastical association with the friary which gave the street where it was found its name. The difficulty with this ecclesiastical pattern stems from the lack of secure context for the majority of the face-querns. In reality it is possible for some or all of them to have been brought to their respective sites at any time subsequent to the sixteenth century. The mortar reused as a font at Stobhall Castle chapel illustrates the problem — it was apparently brought to the castle from Perth by the then Earl of Perth (the owner of Stobhall) in the second half of the twentieth century.³⁷ At St Monance, only a quarter mile south of the Kirk, stand the ruins of Newark Castle, a fifteenth-/sixteenth-century edifice, which could easily have included such a mortar amongst its domestic equipment. That it was pulled from the ruins in later centuries and moved to the church as a curious relic remains a possibility. I remain grateful to Richard Fawcett for drawing his scepticism on the genuineness of the association of churches and mortars/querns to my attention. This is certainly a phenomenon recorded elsewhere in Scotland and the United Kingdom. Lacaille, in his exploration of the wider phenomenon of stone basins, deals with some of the misidentifications as fonts, as well as dealing separately with mortars and querns, including a plain polygonal example associated with St Fillan's Priory, Strathfillan.³⁸ In the wider UK several stone mortars — for example, from Ledsham, Yorkshire; Llantwit Major, Glamorganshire; Builth, Brecknockshire; Darenth, Kent; and Pembroke, Pembrokeshire — of various sizes and with various types of lugging and ribbing,

³⁵ RCAHMS, *South East Perth*, p. 137.

³⁶ Andrew Nicholson, 'The Stone Artefacts', in *Whithorn and St Ninian: The Excavation of a Monastic Town 1984–92*, ed. by Peter Hill (Stroud: Sutton, 1997), pp. 447–74 (esp. pp. 457–58, 459–61, and 462), SE50, nos 5–8.

³⁷ RCAHMS, *South East Perth*, p. 137.

³⁸ Lacaille, 'Stone Basins', deals with mortars at pp. 43–50 and querns at pp. 52–56 (the Strathfillan Priory example is at pp. 55–56). The misidentifications he notes were made by R. J. Walker, 'Scottish Baptismal Fonts', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 21 (1886–87), 346–448.

came to light at the end of the nineteenth century, reused as holy water stoups in churches.³⁹ That said, we should recall the need for such objects at ecclesiastical sites. St Monance chapel (as it then was) was briefly elevated to the status of a Dominican friary (in 1471) and was given conventual status by Pope Sixtus IV in 1476/77. In 1519 it was incorporated with St Andrews with provision for keeping two friars. By 1577 it had no friars and its revenues were not sufficient to support any.⁴⁰ Clearly it was a very insubstantial friary, but it would still have required such hardware as mortars and querns. The other site associations (however loose) documented here with monastic sites (Glenluce, Crossraguel, possibly Inverness and by extension Elgin) are creditable in the context of food production and consumption for their respective fraternal communities. Compare the apparent stone mortar of plain square form with round, concave bowl and exit hole that sits beside the entrance of St Catherine's monastery, Sinai, Egypt.⁴¹ There are also other possibilities; the excavation of two medieval bronze mortars at Glasgow Cathedral promoted a discussion about domestic and industrial uses,⁴² including the preparation of medicines and liturgical substances such as incense, and suggested that across the Glasgow diocese the known examples may support a connection to the cult of St Kentigern. At Whithorn Priory excavations recovered a stone 'mortar' used for mixing paint.⁴³ Whithorn also provides a further, excavated, close corroboration for the pieces under discussion here — a fragment of what the excavators describe as a polygonal stone vessel (with no surviving decoration).⁴⁴

Before turning to look at the symbolic, apotropaic, and humorous values invested in face-masks it is worth noting that undecorated querns also had a range of symbolic values, in large part deriving from the fertility associations to which their use for grain processing linked them. Various magical and cosmological mills occur

³⁹ Anonymous, 'Ancient Font at Cenarth, Carmarthenshire', *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 6th ser., 1 (1901), 155–56 (pp. 153–55).

⁴⁰ Fawcett, *Scottish Abbeys and Priories*, p. 138; Cowan and Easson, *Medieval Religious Houses: Scotland*, pp. 120–21.

⁴¹ Helen C. Evans and Bruce White, *Saint Catherine's Monastery, Sinai, Egypt: A Photographic Essay* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2004), pl. on p. 36.

⁴² D. Gallagher and K. Forsyth, 'Bronze Mortars and Iron Pestle', in *Excavations at Glasgow Cathedral 1988–1997*, ed. by Stephen T. Driscoll, Monograph 18 (Leeds: Society for Medieval Archaeology and Historic Scotland, 2002), pp. 114–19.

⁴³ Nicholson, 'Stone Artefacts', p. 462, no. 8.

⁴⁴ Nicholson, 'Stone Artefacts', p. 462, no. 7.

in Norse, Finnish, Indian, French, and Arabic tales.⁴⁵ In one of the Norse myths the millstone *Grotti* has the power to grind out ill fortune, both physical and abstract, a possible influence on the later medieval development of the 'wheel of fortune'.⁴⁶ The fantastic, metaphorical elements (including mills on the seabed creating whirlpools and sea salt) must also surely have given a humorous delight when recounted as stories. The popularity of such tales may also account for miniature millstones (used as toys and/or amulets) of Viking or Late Norse date.⁴⁷ By contrast, the miracle of the millstone acquired for St Brigit's monastery, Kildare, as recorded in the *Life of St Brigit*, which rolls down a mountain without suffering any damage,⁴⁸ demonstrates how sacredness was invested into every area of monastic life, including the procurement and use of millstones. It should also occasion no surprise that such profane material culture was sometimes marked with the Christian cross, for example, the quern from Dunadd, Argyll — was this a quern specifically so-marked for milling Eucharistic flour?⁴⁹ There are Irish parallels for such cross-marked querns, including examples from Clough Castle, Co. Down and Holy Trinity Abbey, Lough Key, Co. Roscommon, and it has been suggested that the use of the cross in this way was related to laws on compulsory milling at the local water mill rather than in a domestic context.⁵⁰ A further, adaptive, use is indicated by the *Vitae Columbae*, which tells of a cross being set up, fixed in a millstone, on Iona, to mark the spot where Columba took a breather walking back to the monastery at the end of his life.⁵¹ Mill-stones also have an occasional role in

⁴⁵ Clive Tolley, 'The Mill in Norse and Finnish Mythology', *Saga-Book*, 24 (1995), 63–82.

⁴⁶ Tolley, 'The Mill in Norse and Finnish Mythology', p. 78 and p. 76.

⁴⁷ For a recent example from Uphouse Park, Bressay, Shetland, see A. Duffus, 'Uphouse Park Miniature Toy Millstone', *Discovery and Excavation in Scotland*, 3 (2002), 105.

⁴⁸ Charles Thomas, *The Early Christian Archaeology of North Britain* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 210–11.

⁴⁹ Ewan Campbell, 'A Cross-marked Quern from Dunadd and Other Evidence for Relations Between Dunadd and Iona', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 117 (1987), 59–71.

⁵⁰ D. M. Waterman, 'Excavations at Clough Castle, Co. Down', *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, 17 (1954), 103–63 (p. 147 and fig. 16); Miriam Clyne, 'Archaeological Excavations at Holy Trinity Abbey, Lough Key, Co. Roscommon', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 105 (2005), 23–98 (pp. 66–68).

⁵¹ *Adomnán of Iona, Life of St Columba*, trans. by Richard Sharpe (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 373 and n. 406. A second example is Colum Cille's Cross, Ray, Co. Donegal, the cross once kept upright by the use of a millstone and a whin-mill stone; see Angus Graham, 'An Irish Millstone Cross', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 87 (1952–53), 187–91.

martyrdom. The first attempt to execute Sts Crispin and Crispianus, for example, involved tying millstones around their necks and throwing them into the river Aisne, near Soissons.⁵² The magic or mystic mill crops up also in Christian scriptural exegesis where the image of Moses milling grain for Paul has been interpreted as a metaphor for the Old Testament becoming the New, with the mill standing for Christ. It is so depicted on the Romanesque capital (number 20) of the south side of the nave of Vézalay Cathedral, France.⁵³

Human Heads and Face-masks: Marginality and Mischief

The application of face-masks or heads to a range of both fine and prosaic objects and as architectural embellishments is variously and well attested from the late Iron Age/Romano-British period through to the post-medieval. An incomplete arbitrary listing would include coins (often showing a ruler's head), buckle-frames, cloth seals, papal bullae, pilgrim badges, mounts (including a possible medieval version of the Gorgon's head from Salisbury,⁵⁴ and the Christ-like mask on an Insular mount from Crieff, Perthshire⁵⁵), finger-rings, pendants, handles (including an ivory handle from Perth bearing a hooded face),⁵⁶ pottery (both Romano-British face-pots and medieval face-jugs, principally from Scarborough but with local industry copies from elsewhere), and various architectural fittings including gargoyle spouts. The long tradition of the so-called Celtic stone head has been mentioned above,⁵⁷ and alongside it is useful to note more chronologically specific

⁵² I was reminded of this aspect of the legend by the modern replacement of the nave statue of St Crispin, with his millstone, in Notre-Dame Church, Avranches, Normandy.

⁵³ Kirk Ambrose, *The Nave Sculpture of Vézalay: The Art of Monastic Viewing* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2006), pp. 93–94.

⁵⁴ Geoff Egan, 'Lead/Tin Alloy Metalwork', in *Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum Medieval Catalogue Part 3*, ed. by P. Saunders (Salisbury: Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum, 2001), pp. 92–118 (p. 94 no. 46).

⁵⁵ George Henderson and Isabel Henderson, *The Art of the Picts: Sculpture and Metalwork in Early Medieval Scotland* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004), pl. 169.

⁵⁶ Mark A. Hall, 'An Ivory Knife Handle from the High Street, Perth, Scotland: Consuming Ritual in a Medieval Burgh', *Medieval Archaeology*, 45 (2001), 169–88.

⁵⁷ See also Anne Ross, 'The Human Head in Insular Pagan Celtic Britain', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 91 (1957–58), 10–43; George C. Boon, 'The Shrine of the Head, Caerwent', in *Welsh Antiquity*, ed. by G. C. Boon and H. J. Lewis (Cardiff: Cardiff University Press, 1976), pp. 163–75, and Miranda Green, *The Gods of the Celts* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1986).

traditions such as that of Roman bust portraiture.⁵⁸ In medieval contexts the Celtic-style head is prolific, but one example must suffice here. A Norman stone font from Penarth, Carmarthenshire, Wales,⁵⁹ is decorated with several heads or face-masks. For a crucial Christian rite — baptism — it seems to have been acceptable to have the apotropaic protection of the head both on an important physical, sculpted edge and on the enacted margin of a key transitional rite of social passage. Finally in this brief round-up, heads and face-masks make a resurgence in late medieval Italian art, inspired by the discovery of classical Roman grotesquery. Thus in Renaissance Florence highly fashionable wall fountains (*acquaio*) included bust-heads as a standard element of their decorative repertoire, and such heads similarly adorned and provided protection around fireplaces, doorways, windows, and cornices.⁶⁰ Luca Cambiasco's fresco of c. 1565 (in Genoa) includes a bathing scene in which a stucco, grotesque, foliate mask looks in on a painted oval which includes a private bathing cubicle with clear erotic overtones. The water is in part delivered through the mouths of two head-busts.⁶¹ The water connection is further demonstrated by a woodcut entitled *Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden*, made by Michael Wolgemut and Wilhelm Pleydenwurt, to illustrate Hartmann Schedel's *Weltchronik*, published in 1493, in Nuremberg. The woodcut's details include a fountain from which the outflow pipe projects through the mouth of a face-mask decorating a polygonal stone (?) pillar. The water flows into a stone basin and is clearly meant as a representation of the *Fons Vitae*, as it then forms the four rivers of paradise. That such face-masks took 3-D form in Nuremberg is confirmed by the cast brass example in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum there. It depicts a life-sized face of a youth, formerly with a pipe projecting from its open mouth to spout water, having been a fountain mask on the Unschlitthous (tallow office) — a public building erected as a granary in 1490.⁶² The Schedel woodcut is reproduced

⁵⁸ Ian B. Ferris, 'An Empire in Pieces: Roman Archaeology and the Fragment', in *TRAC 2002: Proceedings of the Twelfth Annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference, Canterbury*, ed. by G. Carr, E. Swift, and J. Weekes (Oxford: Oxbow, 2002), pp. 14–29.

⁵⁹ Anonymous, 'Ancient Font at Cenarth', pp. 155–56, and see also Francis Bond, *Fonts and Font Covers* (Oxford: H. Frowde, 1908; reissued London: Waterstones, 1985).

⁶⁰ *At Home in Renaissance Italy*, ed. by Marta Ajmar-Wollheim and Flora Denis (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2006), pp. 284–86.

⁶¹ *At Home in Renaissance Italy*, ed. by Ajmar-Wollheim and Denis, p. 222, fig. 15.16.

⁶² Ursula Mende, 'Late Gothic Aquamanilia from Nuremberg', in *Lions, Dragons and Other Beasts: Aquamanilia of the Middle Ages*, ed. by P. Barnet and P. Dandridge (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006) pp. 19–33 (p. 24 and fig. 2.7).

in the context of a recent discussion of how material culture was able to move fluidly between religious and profane contexts,⁶³ something equally demonstrated by the deployment of face-masks. The monastic deployment of such face-masks goes back to at least the twelfth century. The ruins of the abbey at Daoulas (Finistère, France) include a large sandstone water-basin in the twelfth-century cloister. Resting on a pedestal, this large, round, shallow basin has ten face-masks around its outer face (with bands of geometric decoration between) from which water flows out of the basin. Also in Brittany is a comparable, more eroded, example in granite (now used as a flower planter) beside the cathedral in Dol-de-Bretagne (Ille-et-Vaine). It has fewer face-masks and no apparent decoration otherwise. It probably dates to the twelfth or thirteenth century. We have, then, a temporally wide, functionally diverse range of material culture, all with subtleties of meaning bounded by contexts of production, use, and appropriation and frequently with an apotropaic intent.

One aspect that has perhaps been historically overlooked for many of these manifestations is any humorous intent or appropriation they might have. Humour, of course, is a funny thing. An artist or artisan can execute it and/or a patron commission it, but it will not automatically be appreciated. Likewise it can be formally excluded but still be found to be present by some onlookers or readers. Humour intended or found may be rejoiced in openly or chuckled at privately (in the consciousness of social hierarchical censure). Because of these varying potential responses it is possible to see something such as those aquamanilia in the form of human heads as at the nexus of overlapping sets of values. Straightforwardly as vessels for dispensing water they can carry associations with cleanliness and Godliness (including a suggestion of baptism), but their form as busts or human heads may also suggest a skit or parody on the form of head reliquaries, to which, even with less precious embellishment and the addition of spouts and handles, they have a very similar appearance.⁶⁴ Humour can also lose its bite to later generations, particularly if contingent on other changing fashions or the prevailing cultural orthodoxy (e.g. medieval anti-Jewish satire). None of this should deter continued scholarly attentions to illuminate the funny side of medieval life.

⁶³ *Lions, Dragons and Other Beasts*, ed. by Barnet and Dandridge, cat. 7 (pp. 92–93), for a late twelfth- to early thirteenth-century copper alloy example from Magdeburg, Germany. The saltire design on the tunic may suggest a further level of parodic devotion, linked to St Andrew.

⁶⁴ P. Mason, 'A Dragon Tree in the Garden of Eden: A Case Study of the Mobility of Objects and their Images in Early Modern Europe', *Journal of the History of Collections*, 18 (2006), 169–85 (esp. fig. 6, p. 178).

Several references have been made throughout this paper to marginality. This is not meant to imply any sense of lesser value but to affirm that that which is in the margins is as important for a rounded understanding of the past as what might be defined as the 'mainstream'. Neither is it meant to suggest any binary opposition or structuring of 'high' and 'low' culture.⁶⁵ It does, though, accept an official/unofficial fault-line or opposition detectable in marginal arts. Camille suggested that this was particularly evident in texts from the thirteenth century, which sought to 'gloss, parody, modernise and problematise the text's authority [...] the centre is [...] dependent upon the margins for its cultural existence'.⁶⁶ Camille's analysis acknowledged the work of Bakhtin,⁶⁷ and whilst the duality he identified remains useful, the extent to which he saw carnival as a permitted, limited rebellion, a controlled inversion, does not. This observation was made by Marina Warner in her Foreword to Malcolm Jones's analysis of secular art,⁶⁸ an analysis that shows how widespread and everyday the 'inversion' actually was. Jones eschews any need for an all-encompassing general interpretation of marginalia as alluding to or rejecting their accompanying texts (though clearly some do), preferring to see most 'as "emptily" humorous [...] exercises in the author's imagination',⁶⁹ balancing this with the acceptance of the comic impulse as one of the uses of monstrosity. Of course both Camille and Bakhtin were aware of the deployment and power of humour. In his analysis of gargoyles and mouth-pulling faces Camille charts a change in medieval meaning from terrifying Devil-spawned beast to a reflection of human perversity, labelling the change 'the humanization of the diabolic',⁷⁰ whereby fear gives way to laughter.

Certainly scholars currently seem much more willing to find the humorous in the medieval. The wide variety of fierce and funny faces found particularly in religious architecture could readily have supported biblical exegesis and sermonizing but also betray 'a presumed intention to be clever and witty when creating monstrous grotesque funny faces',⁷¹ which may owe something to the Roman tradition

⁶⁵ Following Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (London: Reaktion, 1992).

⁶⁶ Camille, *Image on the Edge*, p. 10.

⁶⁷ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*.

⁶⁸ Marina Warner, 'Foreword', in Malcolm Jones, *The Secret Middle Ages: Discovering the Real Medieval World* (Stroud: Sutton, 2002), pp. xiv–xvi (p. xv).

⁶⁹ Jones, *Secret Middle Ages*, p. 62.

⁷⁰ Jones, *Secret Middle Ages*, p. 81.

⁷¹ Janetta Rebold Benton, *Medieval Mischief: Wit and Humour in the Middle Age* (Stroud: Sutton, 2004), p. 102.

(as expressed for example in Horace's *Ars Poetica*) of expecting hybrid monsters to provide laughter.⁷² Janetta Rebold Benton adds a wonderful observation that there is a clear implication that some of the funny imagery in question (notably remotely placed church sculptures) would 'only effectively be seen by God, who was believed to be everywhere and to see everything', suggesting that many believed that 'God may have a sense of humour'.⁷³ This idea seems fully in tune with the increasingly accepted notion of the medieval interweaving rather than separation of the profane and the sacred, the official and the carnival, the pious and the playful, the serious and the funny. Annemarieke Willemsen's forthcoming analysis of the function of the profusion of late medieval lead/tin alloy badges and toys clearly demonstrates how narrow and permeable the divide between piety and play was. One of the cases she cites is toy rattles, noting a profusion of other iconographic and textual evidence that depict such rattles as one of Christ's toys. She observes that Christ's play was close to piety and that religious symbols were clearly considered appropriate as toys: 'religious symbolic language was everywhere and [...] it doesn't imply any religious function for the object concerned'.⁷⁴ Put another way, the interweaving of piety and play was legitimized because Christ was both human and God; he was a boundary where the sacred and the profane met.

Punchlines

I hope that the deliberately broad discussion so far has successfully sketched some of the wider cultural contexts in which querns/mortars were embedded.⁷⁵ All that

⁷² Benton, *Medieval Mischief*, following A. Bovey, *Monsters and Grotesques in Medieval Manuscripts* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2002), pp. 40–41.

⁷³ Benton, *Medieval Mischief*, p.140.

⁷⁴ Annemarieke Willemsen, 'A Thin Line between Piety and Play: Functional Aspects of Badges and Toys', paper presented at 'The Finds Research Group AD 700–1700 Day Seminar in Honour of Brian Spencer', Museum of London, 1 November 2002 (publication in preparation).

⁷⁵ As this paper was about to go to press, Hugh Morrison (Historic Scotland) drew my attention to two additional face mortars, both octagonal. One is at Holyrood Abbey (now Palace), Edinburgh and for which half of the face comprises a large, wide-open, shute-mouth, with clearly shaped, flaring sides to funnel out the ground contents of the mortar bowl. The face is otherwise defined by two incised, lentoid eyes and a delicate nose. The bowl has a central depression, presumably a pivot hole. The other is at St Andrews Cathedral, where survey work has revealed the 'lost' quern referred to at p. 118 above. The face is narrow and rectangular with a small mouth opening, a damaged nose, and large, apotropically bulging, lentoid eyes. Its mirthful expression has

now remains is to deliver the punchline, my essay on the humorous intent in, and/or perception of, the combination of querns and face-masks.

It is in fact possible to offer several, overlapping punchlines. First it is conceivable that the expressions portrayed on the various faces, consistently showing wide-open, up-turned mouths and bulging cheeks, can be read as physical depictions of laughter. Secondly it is possible that the sculptured faces are a pun, a very visual, tactile, three-dimensional one on vomiting and bodily evacuation processes that must follow the consumption of food (and some medicines) and a pun just at the moment when preparation for consumption was close at hand. Vomiting may have been particularly in mind if the waste portion of the ground foodstuff (e.g. grain husks) was evacuated through the quern's mouth. Such functioning face-masks share with gargoyle spouts in particular this strand of earthy humour that builds on a prosaic, essential purpose of a piece of material culture. Thirdly there may also be a pun (or pungent) on the smells of foodstuffs as they exit through or just below the noses of the face-masks. Fourthly the permanently fixed, carved actions of laughter or vomiting can be regarded as apotropaic, demon-averting actions, designed to protect the food or medicine or liturgical substance being prepared. This need not stop them from being funny — we all aspire to laugh at danger.

a sense of song about it, opening up another area of punning humour given its monastic context. Further afield, a recent fortuitous visit by the author to the Helston Folk Museum, Cornwall, chanced upon a further example, again from an ecclesiastical context. No doubt many more await recognition.

L'HUMOUR À TRAVERS LES STALLES DE LA CATHÉDRALE D'AMIENS

Kristiane Lemé-Hébuterne

Les stalles de la cathédrale Notre-Dame d'Amiens, construites de 1508 à 1519, sont un des rares ensembles de la fin du Moyen Âge à montrer un programme iconographique d'inspiration religieuse qui s'étale largement sur les miséricordes aussi bien que sur les jouées, les rampes et certains hauts dossiers.¹ Différents livres de l'Ancien Testament sont racontés sur les 110 miséricordes, les rampes qui surmontent les douze jouées basses ainsi que sur les stalles maîtresses,² alors que c'est la Vie de la Vierge, telle que la décrivent les textes apocryphes,³ qui a permis aux tailleurs d'images de trouver les sujets sculptés sur les jouées, basses et hautes, sans oublier les hauts dossiers des stalles d'honneur. Seuls, les appuis-main, les pendentifs et les culs-de-lampe, ces derniers étant particulièrement difficiles à voir, perchés à trois mètres de hauteur dans l'obscurité quasi complète, présentent des scènes de genre, que l'on peut qualifier de profanes, où se mêlent vie quotidienne, illustrations de l'exercice de métiers, quelques proverbes, fantaisies et monstres.

A priori, c'est évidemment sur ces derniers éléments qu'on s'attend à rencontrer des manifestations de l'humour des contemporains des stalles: et en effet, l'humour est présent dans toutes ces petites sculptures évoquant la vie des Amiénois du début

¹ Les miséricordes des stalles de la cathédrale Notre-Dame d'Amiens sont discutées et illustrées dans Elaine C. Block, *Corpus of Medieval Misericords: France* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), pp. 165-72 et 409-13; et l'ensemble des stalles est étudié plus en détail dans Kristiane Lemé-Hébuterne, *Les Stalles de la cathédrale Notre-Dame d'Amiens* (Paris: Éditions Picard, 2007).

² Essentiellement Genèse 1-48, Exode 1-17, Juges 15-16, I Rois 17 et Job 1-2.

³ Protév Jc, Pseudo-Mt, Nativ Marie.

du XVI^e siècle. Mais, sous une forme parfois différente, il s'exprime aussi à travers certaines scènes religieuses, ce qui peut sembler plus étonnant: l'humour, voire le rire franc, fait partie des caractéristiques des miséricordes de la plupart des ensembles de stalles de la fin du Moyen Âge, mais appartient beaucoup moins aux tableaux religieux, qui incitent généralement à plus de retenue. Pourtant, en observant les stalles amiénoises, tout à fait sérieuses, on ressent fréquemment une envie de sourire. Même dans les récits de l'Ancien Testament ou les scènes parfois tragiques de la vie de la Vierge, des détails provoquent un regard amusé.

Il convient cependant d'être prudent: regard amusé, oui, pour le spectateur actuel. Mais qu'en est-il pour les contemporains de la construction des stalles? L'humour est une notion complexe qui peut prendre de multiples facettes qui ont assurément évolué au fil des siècles. Certains ressorts du rire sont sans doute éternels parce que tenant à la nature humaine; mais le sens donné à certaines scènes peut être compris avec plus ou moins d'humour selon le contexte culturel et idéologique. C'est en fait avec les yeux et le sens de l'humour de notre début du XXI^e siècle que nous voyons et comprenons ce que les sculpteurs ont exprimé: il est possible que nous restions insensible devant certains aspects qui les faisaient rire (peut-être parce que nous ne comprenons pas tout ce que nous voyons), ou que nous ressentions de l'humour là où pour les contemporains des stalles, il n'y en avait pas.

L'humour auquel nous sommes sensibles à travers les stalles de la cathédrale d'Amiens prend diverses formes qu'on peut, de façon peut-être schématique, associer aux éléments des stalles concernés, appuis-main, pendentifs, culs-de-lampe ou miséricordes et jouées; en d'autres termes, les types d'humour utilisés varient selon les récits mis en scène, Ancien Testament, Vie de la Vierge ou sujets tirés de la vie amiénoise du début du XVI^e siècle. Notre itinéraire à travers les stalles de la cathédrale d'Amiens va donc nous permettre de découvrir différentes formes d'humour, depuis le rire jusqu'à des manifestations plus subtiles, plus délicates, dont le but est peut-être moins d'inciter à rire mais qui révèlent une certaine joie de vivre, une bonne humeur dont se départissent rarement les personnages sculptés dans le bois de nos stalles.⁴

Ce sont surtout les pendentifs et les culs-de-lampe, et, dans une moindre mesure, les appuis-main, qui provoquent le rire, par la mise en scène notamment de certains vices inhérents aux êtres humains ... Le rire, oui, mais un rire qui se teinte parfois d'accents troubles. Plusieurs pendentifs montrent des personnages qui

⁴ La numérotation utilisée est celle définie par Georges Durand, dans sa *Monographie de l'église Notre-Dame cathédrale d'Amiens*, Mémoires de la Société des Antiquaires de Picardie, 3 vols (Amiens: Yvert et Tellier, 1901-03) II: *Mobilier et accessoires*, pp. 147-285.

boivent et surtout qui boivent trop. Ce n'est pas tant l'usage de la boisson qui est moqué que son excès: sur un appui-main (35–36), un homme tient un pichet et un gobelet dans lequel il boit, sans que la sculpture révèle une quelconque trace d'ironie. En revanche, la façon dont boit l'homme du pendentif 13–14, sans prendre la peine de se servir dans un gobelet, fait sourire. Plus loin (pend. 75–76), un autre homme boit aussi à même le pot, et deux femmes semblent le pousser à boire plus encore. La femme qui accompagne l'homme du pendentif 83–84, au contraire, ne rit pas, mais provoque la moquerie: son compagnon boit largement à même le pichet, tandis que la femme, un gobelet à la main, essaie d'attraper le fond du pot, comme si elle espérait retenir l'homme dans son geste et obtenir sa part.

La luxure fait aussi partie des vices qui se dissimulent dans les hauteurs du dais, loin des yeux des chanoines qui occupaient le chœur. Des hommes nus se livrent à quelque jeu lubrique (pend. 57–58); des femmes très légèrement vêtues sont sculptées dans des attitudes dont la signification paraît claire: trois femmes s'avancent ainsi sur le pendentif 85–86 (Figure 51); celle qui est au centre, la plus visible, tient les mains jointes et la tête inclinée, comme une jeune fille pieuse; pourtant, elle ne porte qu'un léger manteau, noué sur son épaule, manteau que soulève sa jeune voisine, révélant la nudité de sa compagne. Cette deuxième femme est moins dénudée que la première, mais ses jambes se voient très bien sous sa robe courte et fendue. La troisième femme est plus âgée que les deux précédentes et vêtue de façon normale: vraisemblablement s'agit-il d'une mère maquerelle qui fait commerce des charmes de deux jeunes prostituées.

Critique du vice de la luxure? Critique amusée en tout cas. Les trois femmes sont tout à fait souriantes et ne semblent éprouver aucun remords à se livrer à des activités peu recommandables. L'évocation du commerce des charmes féminins dans un lieu aussi sacré que le chœur d'une cathédrale peut sembler surprenante: s'adressait-elle aux chanoines, pour les détourner de la tentation? Mais cette petite sculpture est charmante, bien peu dissuasive et on voit mal comment ces femmes enjouées pourraient inspirer la crainte du péché.

D'autres représentations dans les stalles amiénoises peuvent nous sembler quelque peu ambiguës. Des fous se rencontrent ainsi sur les appuis-main et les culs-de-lampe, caractérisés parfois par le bonnet à oreilles d'âne et à grelots, et surtout la marotte dont l'extrémité montre la tête du fou. Le cul-de-lampe 30–31 est entièrement occupé par un de ces fous, qui ne fait rien, si ce n'est regarder sa marotte (Figure 52). Sur l'appui-main 26–27, la marotte est utilisée comme un bâton sur lequel s'appuie en marchant le fou, qui, dans une hotte en osier sur son dos, porte deux enfants qui rient à pleine gorge (Figure 53). Lui-même semble très gai en regardant l'un des enfants qui tire le pan de son capuchon à oreilles d'âne.



Figure 51. Femmes dévoilées, pendentif 85–86, stalles de la cathédrale d'Amiens. © Kristiane Lemé-Hébuterne.

Quel sens donner à ces quelques fous? Sont-ils ici uniquement pour faire rire? Pour se moquer des personnes dont la raison n'est pas très solide? N'y a-t-il pas autre chose? N'oublions pas que ces stalles datent du début du XVI^e siècle: *La Nef des fous*, de Sébastien Brant, sorte d'inventaire des folies humaines, paru en 1494 à Bâle, est rapidement traduit et publié en France; *L'Eloge de la Folie*, d'Erasmus, paraît en 1511. Sous ce titre paradoxal apparaît une critique virulente de tous les



Figure 52. Fou regardant sa marotte, cul-de-lampe 30–31, stalles de la cathédrale d'Amiens. © Kristiane Lemé-Hébuterne.

excès de l'époque. D'autres types de fous se rencontrent à la fin du Moyen Âge, Triboulet étant peut-être le plus connu: les bouffons, au service du roi ou des grands de ce monde, qu'ils doivent divertir, mais qui peuvent aussi se permettre d'adresser des critiques, de dire des vérités sous forme de bêtises ... Triboulet (1479–1536), mis en scène dans *Pantagruel* par Rabelais, a servi comme fou auprès de Louis XII puis de François I^{er}, et était très apprécié. Les fous du roi sont, comme ceux de nos stalles, coiffés du bonnet à oreilles d'âne agrémenté de grelots, et tiennent leur marotte comme le roi son sceptre. La marotte n'est pas qu'un insigne de la folie, elle a d'autres usages. Reflétant le visage de celui qui la regarde, elle joue le rôle d'un miroir, d'un révélateur, qui renvoie à chacun sa propre folie. Enfin, il ne faut pas négliger non plus les sous-entendus religieux possibles: le psaume 13 (selon la Bible de Sacy), dans son verset 1, ne dit-il pas 'L'insensé dit en son cœur: Il n'y a point de Dieu'? Il est probable que toutes ces significations se retrouvent dans nos fous de bois, qui se prêtent à ces différentes interprétations selon la personne qui les regarde, chanoine, artisan, ou homme du XXI^e siècle. Ces fous ne sont peut-être pas très éloignés de la 'sagesse populaire' qui, dit-on, s'exprime dans les proverbes qu'Elaine C. Block s'est plu à rechercher patiemment dans toutes les stalles d'Europe. Certains ensembles de stalles sont plus riches en



Figure 53. Fou portant ses enfants sur son dos, appui-main 26–27, stalles de la cathédrale d'Amiens. © Kristiane Lemé-Hébuterne.

représentations de proverbes que les stalles de la cathédrale d'Amiens,⁵ mais on peut tout de même admirer ici quelques belles illustrations sur les appuis-main, mais aussi à d'autres endroits moins faciles à voir. Renard qui prêche aux poules, ou plutôt Renart, est en bonne place sur un appui-main (7–8). Vêtu d'une chape, Renart a pris place dans une chaire portative et s'adresse de façon véhémement aux volailles assemblées autour de lui, usant de gestes pour mieux transmettre son message (Figure 54). Hypocrite comme les religieux dont cette expression se moque, il a déjà dissimulé quelques poules dans sa capuche.

Plus loin, les sculpteurs ont utilisé adroitement la disposition des stalles en perpendiculaire pour illustrer, sur l'appui-main double 53–54, l'expression 'deux têtes sous le même bonnet': les corps des personnages partent chacun d'une parclose et les têtes se rejoignent sous une capuche commune (Figure 55). Deux têtes s'abritant sous le même bonnet montrent une amitié très forte, une complicité entre les deux individus, mais avec une nuance négative. Bien souvent, la bonne entente des deux compères est utilisée pour jouer des tours, un peu dans le sens de 's'entendre comme larrons en foire'. L'illustration de cette expression se retrouve dans un grand nombre d'ensembles de stalles: des miséricordes, à Blainville-Crevon (Seine-Maritime), Mortain (Manche), Champeaux (Seine-et-Marne), Amsterdam (Pays-Bas) permettent de réfléchir aux multiples interprétations qu'on peut donner à ces quelques mots. Parfois les visages sont très souriants, mais ils peuvent aussi se faire face, grimaçants, voire agressifs. Dans les stalles amiénoises, les deux compères semblent très bien s'entendre en effet, montrant des visages hilares. Mais ce qui est le plus étonnant ici, c'est que ces deux individus ressemblent fort à des clercs: l'un d'eux tient un livre ouvert, qu'il laisse pendre au bout de son bras, délaissant peut-être le service du chœur. A l'inverse des deux têtes sous le même bonnet qui s'entendent trop bien, les 'deux chiens pour un os' ne s'accordent pas. Ils sont jaloux l'un de l'autre et essaient chacun de dérober la proie à l'adversaire. Cette petite scène, souvent mise en images dans les stalles,⁶ est placée discrètement sur le dossier du siège dans lequel Pharaon songe aux vaches maigres (Rampe C52, en bas). La sculpture mesure quelques millimètres de haut (Figure 56), et pourtant elle est très nette.

D'autres proverbes ont été sculptés dans de petites dimensions, à des endroits qui ne sont pas immédiatement visibles quand on regarde les stalles: chaque parclose est ornée dans sa partie haute d'une frise de museau, sculptée dans la gorge de la moulure. Les frises varient d'une stalle à l'autre, pour la plupart constituées de

⁵ Saint-Martin-aux-Bois dans l'Oise, ou Champeaux en Seine-et-Marne, pour ne citer que deux exemples.

⁶ Citons, entre autres, en France Vendôme, Champeaux, Kempen ou Emmerich en Allemagne.



Figure 54. Renart prêche aux poules, appui-main 7-8, stalles de la cathédrale d'Amiens.

© Kristiane Lemé-Hébuterne.



Figure 55. Deux têtes sous le même bonnet, appui-main 53-54, stalles de la cathédrale d'Amiens. © Kristiane Lemé-Hébuterne.



Figure 56. Deux chiens pour un os, rampe C52, stalles de la cathédrale d'Amiens. © Kristiane Lemé-Hébuterne.



Figure 57. Je trompe le monde, le monde mangé des rats, frise d'accoudoir 107, stalles de la cathédrale d'Amiens. © Kristiane Lemé-Hébuterne.

motifs Renaissance, dauphins, rinceaux qui s'entremêlent, putti et oiseaux fantastiques. Celle de la stalle 107 (Figure 57) présente un énorme globe crucifère autour duquel s'animent d'un côté un putto qui souffle dans un cor, de l'autre côté un gros animal à quatre pattes et longue queue, rat vraisemblablement, que menace un autre putto armé d'une lance. Ces petits sujets ne sont pas seulement décoratifs, mais évoquent les expressions proverbiales 'je trompe le monde' et 'les rats mangent le globe', souvent utilisées à la fin du Moyen Âge lorsqu'il s'agissait de dire que le monde est à l'envers,⁷ que tout est sens dessus dessous, que tout va mal. L'humour a donc été utilisé dans les stalles amiénoises pour énoncer des critiques contre le monde de la fin du Moyen Âge. Mais quelle est la part de responsabilité des religieux qui ont dirigé le programme iconographique des stalles dans le choix de ces proverbes? Se sont-ils préoccupés de ces petites sculptures, qui pouvaient n'être que

⁷ Voir à ce sujet Sylvie Bethmont-Gallerand, 'Les Images du monde dans les stalles aux XV^e et XVI^e siècles', dans *Art sacré: Cahiers de Rencontre avec le Patrimoine religieux*, no. 12: *Stalles et miséricordes – Spiritualité et truculence*, Actes du Colloque de Vendôme: 30 septembre–1^{er} octobre 1999 (Poitiers: Le Blanc, 2000), pp. 31–46.

des détails, laissés à la libre interprétation des artisans? En l'absence de textes des chanoines, il est bien difficile de le dire.

D'autres sculptures font aussi appel à l'humour pour exprimer un jugement sur un comportement dont les conséquences seront pour le moins fâcheuses: sur le pendentif 67–68 une jeune femme élégante se regarde dans un miroir qu'elle tient à la main; sur le côté du pendentif, un jeune homme lui tend une tête de mort. Humour, un peu grinçant peut-être, comme celui qu'on trouve dans les Danses macabres de la même époque, pour inciter les êtres humains à fuir les plaisirs de ce monde et à se préparer à l'issue inexorable de chaque vie humaine. La même idée est exprimée par les deux appuis-main 62–63 et 63–64: un homme se drape élégamment dans son manteau, et lève la main, dans un geste d'effroi peut-être à la vue du personnage sinistre qui, sur l'appui-main voisin, lui montre un écu sur lequel apparaît en fort relief une tête de mort. Si le mouvement de peur du jeune homme peut faire rire, ici aussi, il s'agira d'un rire 'jaune', grinçant, voire mal à l'aise.

N'y a-t-il donc dans les stalles amiénoises que cette forme d'humour mitigé? Il est vrai que le rire franc, sans arrière-pensée, ne s'y déploie pas: on ne trouve pas de ces scènes de fantaisie débridée qu'on peut voir dans d'autres ensembles de stalles, il n'y a pas d'excès ici, d'aucune sorte. Mais les artisans, et peut-être les religieux qui les dirigeaient, ont émaillé les récits d'un grand nombre de notations qui font sourire, les scènes religieuses ne restant pas à l'écart, loin de là. Par exemple, dans le récit de la vie de Joseph, le panetier est supplicié (Gn 40. 22), pendu à un arbre (rampe C51, en haut). Derrière le gibet, le bourreau est agenouillé, reconnaissable à son vêtement, chausses dépareillées, et à la corde qui lui barre la poitrine (Figure 58). Il fait une grimace qui semble bien exprimer sa déception, en fouillant dans le sac du panetier, et n'y trouvant vraisemblablement rien qui vaille. Rappelons qu'à Amiens, comme dans la plupart des villes, les bourreaux jouissaient d'un certain nombre de privilèges: quoique bien rémunérés par l'échevinage, ils avaient le droit de prélever des marchandises au marché, de toucher des redevances sur certaines denrées vendues, et ils pouvaient aussi récupérer l'argent que les suppliciés avaient sur eux au moment de leur mise à mort au gibet. Le bourreau du panetier n'est donc pas un voleur, il exerce un de ses droits, regrettant sans doute de trouver un sac vide, ce qui provoque sa grimace. Il est vraisemblable que ce genre de situation se soit produit fréquemment; les bourreaux ne s'attendaient pas à trouver des richesses dans les biens des condamnés. La grimace que lui fait faire l'artisan exprime sans doute plus la moquerie de sa part qu'un véritable trait de caractère constaté chez les bourreaux. Les artisans éprouaient peu de sympathie pour ce personnage qu'ils étaient obligés de faire figurer dans le récit de l'emprisonnement de Joseph puis dans la scène de la Crucifixion (jouée J96). Ils se sont sans doute



Figure 58. Le bourreau, rampe C51, stalles de la cathédrale d'Amiens.

© Kristiane Lemé-Hébuterne.

amusés à le représenter ainsi, pour faire rire à ses dépens, et exorciser la crainte que tout le monde peut ressentir à la vue du bourreau.

D'autres notations amusantes, ou légères, viennent de la présence, dans les scènes de l'Ancien Testament aussi bien que dans celles qui illustrent la vie de Marie, de certains animaux qui ont sans doute un rôle à jouer, quelque chose à exprimer. Un animal peut faire sourire par l'incongruité de sa présence dans une scène sérieuse, voire dramatique. Un savoureux exemple est donné par l'épisode de la Dormition de la Vierge (jouée L86). Marie est allongée sur un châlit de bois, les mains jointes, entourée des apôtres qui, alertés par des anges, se sont rassemblés pour l'assister dans ses derniers instants. L'un est assis au pied de la couche et lit les prières des morts dans un livre, un autre debout balance un encensoir, un plus jeune, Jean vraisemblablement, s'effondre en pleurant à côté de la Vierge. Tous les gestes de la 'bonne mort' sont là qu'on peut retrouver dans les *Artes moriendi* imprimés à la fin du Moyen Âge. Rien d'amusant dans cette scène du trépas de la Vierge plus proche du pathétique que du comique.

Pourtant, quand on a bien observé les personnages qui se pressent autour du lit, on finit par remarquer qu'ils sont curieusement placés: même ceux qui sont dans le fond de la scène sont bien visibles et dépassent par dessus ceux qui sont immédiatement à proximité du lit. La partie supérieure des jouées hautes où se trouve disposée cette scène est sculptée à claire-voie, c'est-à-dire qu'en regardant le revers de la jouée, dans l'intérieur des stalles, on voit le dos des personnages. Les apôtres qui se trouvaient dans le fond de la pièce sont ici vus de dos, en premier plan: ils sont perchés sur un banc, pour mieux voir ce qui se passe (Figure 59). Ce subterfuge en lui-même fait sourire et le sourire s'élargit encore quand on remarque sous le banc la présence d'animaux, chats ou rats. Une observation plus minutieuse de ces animaux invite cependant à réfléchir: l'animal de droite, oreilles pointues, longue queue, peut en effet appartenir à la famille des rongeurs. Mais celui de gauche est plus énigmatique: pattes griffues, tête de chèvre, portant un petit bouc, ne s'agirait-il pas du diable qui, comme il le fait chaque fois qu'un être humain meurt, tente de venir s'approprier l'âme qui quitte le corps? Pauvre diable, obligé de se réfugier sous le banc, avec les animaux parasites, car il n'y a assurément pas de place pour lui dans la maison où la Vierge, en paix, quitte la vie comme tout bon chrétien devrait le faire. Doit-on qualifier ces détails d'humoristiques? Ils le sont en partie, destinés sans doute à briser quelque peu la tension dramatique liée à l'événement qui se déroule de l'autre côté de la jouée. Mais l'humour peut aussi servir l'expression de pensées profondes et tout à fait religieuses.

On retrouve une utilisation des animaux dans d'autres épisodes de la vie de la Vierge. Un petit chat s'est glissé sous le magnifique dressoir qui meuble la pièce où



Figure 59. Dormition de Marie, revers, apôtres grimpés sur un banc, jouée L86, stalles de la cathédrale d'Amiens. © Kristiane Lemé-Hébuterne.

Marie, enfant, apprend à lire avec sa mère (jouée C52). Rien de dramatique *a priori* dans cette scène: une fillette debout à côté de sa mère assise sur un haut fauteuil, dans une pièce richement meublée et équipée d'une cheminée, lit dans un livre ouvert sur les genoux de sa mère (Figure 60). Un détail, pourtant, montre qu'il ne s'agit pas d'une scène de la vie quotidienne et que cette petite fille est bien différente des autres. En effet, les portes du dressoir sont sculptées et, de part et d'autre de la serrure, deux personnages se font face: à droite, une jeune femme agenouillée prie, à gauche, un ange debout lui parle. En plaçant ici une minuscule scène de l'Annonciation, les sculpteurs (et surtout peut-être les religieux qui les dirigeaient) ont voulu affirmer que, dès sa naissance, Marie était prédestinée. Elle n'en est pas moins une petite fille qui vit dans le monde réel et le chat dissimulé sous le meuble est là pour le rappeler de façon amusante.

Indispensables dans certaines scènes, les moutons contribuent aussi parfois, par leur attitude, à l'allègement de la tension: Caïn tue Abel au milieu du troupeau qui pâit tranquillement (dorsal A1, frise du bas). Les moutons sont tout à fait indifférents à ce qui se passe auprès d'eux. Pire même, deux bédouins s'affrontent, tête contre tête, la suprématie dans le troupeau étant pour eux plus importante que le drame qui se déroule. Mais l'affrontement des deux animaux ne peut-il aussi évoquer celui qui oppose les deux frères? On retrouve deux bédouins qui se battent à côté des bergers écoutant l'annonce de la naissance de Jésus, au revers de la jouée F31 où figure la Nativité. S'agissait-il pour les sculpteurs de faire sourire, en ajoutant de tels petits détails? De montrer que tous ces événements se passent dans le monde réel, concret? Mais l'indifférence, bien compréhensible, dont font preuve les animaux peut avoir une signification plus large: malgré l'importance des événements sculptés dans le bois des stalles, le monde continue sa course.

Ce n'est donc pas un humour débridé qui s'exprime à travers les sculptures des stalles amiénoises. On sourit plus qu'on ne rit en regardant les scènes des miséricordes et des jouées. Les pendentifs et les culs-de-lampe, on l'a vu, prêtent plus à rire. Il est vraisemblable que, pour ces éléments haut perchés, peu visibles (il faut monter sur un escabeau, muni d'un éclairage, pour voir et photographier les culs-de-lampe), les religieux ont laissé une part importante de liberté aux sculpteurs, dans le choix des sujets autant que dans la façon de les traiter.

Les scènes des miséricordes et des jouées, évoquant des épisodes importants de la religion, sont plus sérieuses, parfois même graves et dramatiques. Pourtant, par des notations diverses, par de petits détails qui pourraient paraître insignifiants, tout se déroule dans une atmosphère enjouée. Ces détails, auxquels il ne faut pas dénier une intention amusante, sont aussi parfois porteurs d'une signification plus profonde. L'humour peut aussi servir à aller plus loin dans l'expression de sentiments religieux peut-être difficiles à rendre dans le bois des stalles.



Figure 60. Marie apprend à lire avec sa mère, jouée C52, stalles de la cathédrale d'Amiens. © Kristiane Lemé-Hébuterne.

La plupart des personnages de ces stalles sont beaux, aimables, agréables à regarder et semblent heureux de vivre. N'y avait-il donc à Amiens que bonheur, paix, prospérité? Le malheur, la pauvreté, n'ont été que très peu mis en scène dans cet ensemble de stalles.⁸ Certes des moqueries se rencontrent, des critiques s'expriment, essentiellement sur les pendentifs, les culs-de-lampe et dans une moindre mesure sur les appuis-main. Mais elles sont toujours amusées, traitées avec légèreté et restent minoritaires par rapport à l'ensemble. Elles n'entachent pas le message que voulaient exprimer les chanoines, dont la vision religieuse s'inscrit tout à fait dans la mentalité des débuts de la Renaissance. Cette Renaissance s'illustre dans le bois des stalles par certaines sculptures décoratives, rinceaux, candélabres, dauphins ... mais elle se reflète également dans l'esprit fait d'optimisme et de confiance, en Dieu mais aussi en l'être humain, qui transparait largement dans les stalles amiénoises.

⁸ Quelques personnages en appui-main et pendentifs sont pauvrement vêtus, voire dépenaillés.

UN CROQUEMITAINE DANS LES STALLES

Sylvie Bethmont-Gallerand

Une même grimace, consistant à tirer la langue tout en étirant les commissures des lèvres avec deux doigts, semble avoir parcouru les siècles, on la retrouve dans nombre de miséricordes de stalles médiévales. Pour notre temps elle est l'apanage de garnements défilant le monde adulte. L'art contemporain comme la publicité en font usage, témoignant de la valeur universelle de cette simple gestuelle.¹ Un exemple récent, une vidéo datée de 1969 du plasticien Bruce Nauman, 'Pulling Mouth', a été exposée en 2006 dans une salle consacrée à 'la défiguration', au Centre Georges-Pompidou (Beaubourg) à Paris, aux côtés d'œuvres contemporaines de Picasso et de Dubuffet. Le texte d'accompagnement parle de 'la célébration de la laideur et de la violence faite au visage' et les comparaisons formelles avec les recherches de Picasso, voire de Bacon, nous entraînent bien loin des rivages de l'enfance. Cette déformation d'un visage adulte en souligne la décomposition, avec effet de laideur et de pathétique sous l'éclairage violent de cette vidéo en noir et blanc. La déshumanisation et la violence faite au visage humain, créé à l'image de Dieu selon la Bible, verseraient plutôt ce corpus d'images dans le domaine de la peur et du démoniaque. Elles remontent aux images antiques, masques de théâtre tragique ou tête décapitée de Méduse, la Gorgone mortelle. Cependant, si la Méduse semble destinée à inspirer la terreur, cette grimace est devenue, au cours des siècles, l'emblème de l'insoumission, de l'insolence, de la transgression jusqu'à incarner l'enfance facétieuse.

¹ L'image d'un enfant grimaçant de la sorte fit la une du numéro spécial des *Echos*, daté de mars 2006 consacré à l'autorité en crise, *Enjeux, Les Echos*, numéro spécial, n° 222, mars 2006.

Les Noms d'une grimasse²

Au Moyen Âge, la première explication du nombre important de ces images amusantes, que l'on trouve en nombre sur les modillons romans, tient à leur valeur décorative. Les sculptures de stalles médiévales d'Europe offrent également un large éventail de cette grimace déformant, dans tous les cas, des visages adultes. Le dictionnaire archéologique de Victor Gay, donne une définition des grimaces comme intimement liées aux miséricordes des stalles de la toute fin du Moyen Âge. '*Grimaces*: Figures satiriques ou grimaçantes telles qu'on les voit sculptées sous les miséricordes de stalles d'églises au XV^e siècle.'³ Le rôle de remplissage joué par les feuillages et autres éléments décoratifs est attesté par les sources. Victor Gay cite le contrat pour les stalles de l'Hôtel-Dieu d'Angers en 1426: 'Conrardin Chapelle, ouvrier de menurie, marchande [...] de faire un cuer de 36 chaires que haultes que basses [...] sans ymages ne grimasses.'⁴ Dans le contrat passé entre les chanoines de Tréguier et les menuisiers Gérard Dru et Tugdual Kergus pour la réalisation des stalles de la cathédrale de Tréguier, il est précisé que des 'feillages et grimasses (seront taillés) jusqu'à emplisement de l'eupvre', entre les scènes historiées faisant l'objet d'une commande spécifique.⁵ Les termes du contrat des stalles de Tréguier permettent de comprendre combien ces grimaces, même si elles sont indissociables de l'iconographie des stalles, pouvaient peu compter dans l'établissement d'un programme iconographique d'ensemble. En effet quelle valeur peut-on donner à de telles fantaisies face au grand art religieux? La plupart des sculptures de stalles conservées sur le Continent datent de la fin du Moyen Âge, à la charnière de deux époques elles sont les réceptacles de traditions mais également des images de modes, des images à la mode.

² Les auteurs français la nomment à présent 'Baboue'. En Allemagne elle porte le nom de *Gähnmaul* (baillement) et les auteurs anglo-saxons peinent à lui trouver un nom, parfois celui de *Mouth-puller* ou *Grimacer*. Anthony Weir et James Jerman, *Images of Lust: Sexual Carvings on Medieval Churches* (London: Batsford, 1986), cité par Malcolm Jones, *The Secret Middle Ages: Discovering the Real Medieval World* (Stroud: Sutton, 2002), p. 323, n. 65. Elaine C. Block, *Corpus of Medieval Misericords: France* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003); Block, *Corpus of Medieval Misericords: Iberia* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005).

³ Victor Gay, *Glossaire archéologique du Moyen Âge et de la Renaissance*, 2 vols (Paris: Librairie de la Société bibliographique, 1887), I, 799.

⁴ '(1426) marché pour l'Hôtel-Dieu d'Angers, *Revue des sociétés Savantes*, 1868, 1^e sem., p. 282': Gay, *Glossaire archéologique*, p. 799.

⁵ Anatole de Barthélémy, *Mélanges historiques et archéologiques sur la Bretagne*, 2 vols (Paris: V. Didron, 1853-68), II, 111-21.

La *grimasse*, qui nous occupe ici, n'est pas due à la simple fantaisie décorative de huchiers bien inspirés, elle porte même un nom, selon Jacques Berlioz et Danièle Alexandre-Bidon au XIII^e siècle c'est un substantif masculin, le *Barbo* ou *Barbeu*, et à partir du XV^e le substantif féminin, parfois donné en sobriquet, de *Baboue*.⁶ Les personnages sculptés dans les stalles, qui étirent leurs commissures de lèvres et tirent la langue, ne jouent pas. Ils se défigurent volontairement, exhibant ce qui doit être caché, la langue, les dents, révélant une animalité qu'indique la proximité du nom de Baboue avec les *babouyneries*, terme consacré aux images simiesques dans les *marginalia*. Les dictionnaires de la langue française du Moyen Âge, comme celui de Frédéric Godefroy en donnent plusieurs occurrences et graphies,⁷ *Baboe*, *Baboue*, *Babou*, *Babouye*, *Babau*, *Babaye*, auxquelles on peut ajouter *Baboye*, *Baboyne*, *Babewyn* en anglais. Documentés dès le XIII^e siècle, ils ont précédé l'expression 'faire la *Baboue*'.

'Des êtres verbaux'

Pour Walter Von Wartburg,⁸ ces substantifs prennent pour socle la racine *bab-* grimace. Ils ont en commun d'être formés à partir d'un même mouvement des lèvres qui avancent quand on les prononce, donnant une allure simiesque au visage. Parmi les dérivés de la racine *bab-*, nous trouvons en français *babiller*: bégayer (v. 1170) et *babil*. Quant aux *babines* (n. f. 1460), elles appartiennent indifféremment au monde animal ou aux gourmands qui se lèchent les lèvres. D'autres substantifs,

⁶ Il revient à ces auteurs d'avoir déterminé le champ sémantique et les images liés à cette expression; qu'ils reçoivent ici ma gratitude pour les échanges qu'ils m'ont offert. Jacques Berlioz, 'Masques et croquemitaines, à propos de l'expression "Faire barbo" au Moyen Âge', dans *Le Monde alpin et rhodanien, Mélanges Charles Joisten* (Grenoble: [n.pub.], 1982), pp. 221–34; Danièle Alexandre-Bidon et Jacques Berlioz, 'Le Masque et la barbe, figures du croquemitaine médiéval', dans *Les Croquemitaines, faire peur et éduquer, Le Monde alpin et rhodanien, revue d'ethnologie*, éd. par Centre Alpin et Rhodanien d'Ethnologie (Grenoble: [n.pub.], 1998), pp. 163–86; Danièle Alexandre-Bidon, 'Fonction et évolution du jeu des masques', dans *À quoi joue-t-on? Pratiques et usages des jeux et jouets à travers les âges*, Colloque scientifique. Montbrison Loire-Foréz, 30 septembre, 1er et 2 octobre 1998, éd. par ville de Montbrison (Montbrison: [n.pub.], 1998), pp. 85–104, ill. pp. i–v.

⁷ Frédéric Godefroy, *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française et de tous ses dialectes du IX^e au XV^e siècles, composé d'après le dépouillement de tous les plus importants documents manuscrits [...]*, 10 vols (Paris, 1880–1902; facsimile Genève: Slatkine, 1982), I, 544–45.

⁸ Walter von Wartburg, *Französisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 25 vols (Tübingen: Thierbach, 1910–2003), I, 297b–298a.

toujours féminins, désignent des moqueries ou de sottes plaisanteries, évoquant des singeries sous la forme de *babueries* (Christine de Pisan) ou encore d'une *babuse-babuse* (Martin Le Franc, *Champion des Dames*).⁹

C'est aussi un sobriquet que l'on trouve dans un registre criminel du Châtelet de Paris, daté du 26 décembre 1390, une certaine Climence femme de Berthaut Elies est dite *la Babboe* dans le procès de Jehan du Bois.¹⁰ Au XVII^e siècle, le dictionnaire anglais-français de Randle Cotgrave rassemble sous cette même racine,¹¹ des plaisanteries et des grimaces consistant à *babiner* ('to play with the lips, to prattle, or talke hard'), *baboiner*, *babouïner* ('to baboonize it, to play the monkey, to use a pish or foolish tricks, waggish or knauish pranks, also to deceive, cofen, gull'), ou encore faire la *Babou* ('to bob, or to make a mow at'). Pour cet auteur la *Baboye* est une fable, une plaisanterie et l'on ne peut transcrire en anglais *baboyer* sans faire une grimace: *baboyer* ('to blabber with the lips'). En anglais moderne, *to blab* signifie jaser, et l'onomatopée 'bla-bla-bla', que l'on prononce avec ce même mouvement de lèvres, existe depuis le Moyen Âge pour désigner et moquer un bavardage oisieux. En témoigne la gravure strasbourgeoise de Hans Weiditz d'Aschaffenburg, datée de 1521–22; deux paroissiennes délaissant leur rosaire sont représentées en plein bavardage alors que le démon Titivillus, ou son associé, transcrit leurs paroles en s'appliquant à écrire: *bip bap bip bap, tulle tulle*, soit *bla bla bla*.¹² La *Baboue* est donc d'abord l'un de ces 'êtres verbaux' dont nous ne pouvons avoir ni figuration, ni manifestation matérielle, selon la typologie de Nicole Belmont.¹³ Mais ce substantif désigne également des éléments visibles, tangibles, matériels que l'on retrouve dans le domaine des jeux et divertissements.

⁹ Godefroy, *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française*, I, 545–46.

¹⁰ 'Item, accusé en sa resence par Climence, femme Bertaut Helies, dit la Baboe, disant que, ondit samedi derrenierement passe, lui fu coppe, elle estant au marchié ou l'on vent le fruit, une sienne bourse de drap': *Registre criminel du Châtelet de Paris, du 6 septembre 1389 au 18 mai 1392*, intro. par Henri Duplès-Agier (Paris: C. Lahure, Société des Bibliophiles François, 1861–64), II, 6–11.

¹¹ Randle Cotgrave, *A Dictionary of French and English Tongues* (London: Islip, 1611), p. 83.

¹² Sylvie Bethmont-Gallerand et Christine Leduc, 'Le Diable, les bavardes et les clercs', dans *Art sacré: Cahiers de Rencontre avec le Patrimoine religieux*, no. 18: *Le décor mural des églises*, Actes du Colloque de Châteauroux: 18–20 octobre 2001 (Poitiers: Le Blanc, 2003), pp. 215–34.

¹³ Nicole Belmont, 'Comment on fait peur aux enfants', *Topique, revue freudienne*, 13 (1974), 101–25 (p. 125).

Un jeu, une grimace

Au XV^e siècle c'est le nom d'un jeu de hasard pour adultes, un jeu 'de sort', un passe-temps royal prisé de Charles VII¹⁴ et Charles VIII.¹⁵ Ce jeu 'de tables permis aux honnêtes gens',¹⁶ François Villon dans une ballade en jargon en donne une moins noble référence puisque la *Baboue* est citée, parmi les jeux des 'tailleurs de bourse' (dénoueurs de feuilles) qu'attendent le gibet (la tige) et la corde du bourreau, en quelques vers formant l'acrostiche du nom du poète: VILLON.

Vive David! Saint Archquin! la baboue!
 Jehan, mon amy, qui les fueilles desnoue
 Le vengeur, beffleur comme une choue,
 Loing de son plain, des ses flos curieulx
 Noe beaucoup, dont il reçoit fressoue
 Jonc verdoyant, haure de marieux.¹⁷

Le 'roy David', consiste à ouvrir une 'serrure, ung huiz, ou i coffre et le refermer', ce qu'explique la ballade VIII: 'Vous qui tenez voz terres et vos fiefz | Du gentil roy David appelé.'¹⁸ Saint Archquin désigne le jeu de dés, et la *Baboue* est sans doute le même jeu de table (à moins qu'il ne s'agisse d'un concours de grimaces), figurant parmi les amusements du jeune Gargantua, dont la liste offre à l'historien des stalles une source semble-t-il inépuisable.¹⁹ Rabelais cite encore la *Baboue* dans son *Quart Livre*, mais cette fois-ci ce n'est plus un jeu: 'Panurge luy feist la Babou en signe de dérision.' Ce que les auteurs traduisent par faire la moue,²⁰ ou encore faire claquer,

¹⁴ Gaston Esnault, 'Le Jargon de Villon', *Romania*, 72 (1951), 296.

¹⁵ 'BABOUE: Jeu de hasard qui figure, avec le jeu de cartes le *fluz*, parmi les passe-temps de Charles VIII, mais pour une somme dix fois moindre, 1491, *Compte des menus plaisirs du roi*, f° 25': Gay, *Glossaire archéologique*, I, 92.

¹⁶ Eloy d'Amerval, *Le Livre de la Deablerie*, éd. critique par Robert Deschaux et Bernard Charrier, Textes littéraires français, 406 (Genève: Droz, 1991), II, 13.

¹⁷ Ballade, X, *Brouez, benrds, eschecquez a la saulve*, dans *François Villon, édition bilingue*, coll. Champion Classiques, 10 (Paris: Champion, 2004), pp. 416–17, notes p. 434. Cette ballade en jargon est commentée par Marcel Schwob, *Études sur l'argot français* (Paris: Allia, 1999; 1^e édition 1889), p. 103.

¹⁸ *François Villon, édition bilingue*, p. 411.

¹⁹ *Gargantua*, 22: François Rabelais, *Gargantua, première édition critique faite sur l'editio princeps* (Genève: Droz, 1970), ch. XX, ligne 138, p. 136 et p. 360.

²⁰ François Rabelais, *Le Quart-Livre*, chap. 56 (Paris: Éditions du Livre de Poche, 1967), p. 497, n. 22.

avec un doigt, la lèvre inférieure contre la supérieure;²¹ ce qui, soit dit en passant produit le son *bab-bab-bab*.

Le *Dictionnaire de Trévoux* dans son édition de 1771, tout en citant Rabelais, élargit notre compréhension des usages de la *Baboue*. Sous l'entrée BABAU,²² il donne comme définition:

BABAU, est je ne sais quel fantôme imaginaire dont les nourrices du Languedoc et pays voisins se servent pour faire peur aux petits enfants ou aux timides et imbécilles, *Larva umbratilis*.²³ On appelle *Babau* généralement tout ce dont on fait peur sans jamais pourtant faire de mal [...]. C'est aussi ce qu'explique le S. de la Peyre, dans son *Anti-Babau*, qui, selon lui, ne veut dire autre chose que *chasse-frayeur*. BAILLET. Panurge lui fit le *babau*, en signe de dérision, dit Rabelais. Ce que M. Duchat interprète par *grimaces de singe*, en citant un passage où une nourrice menace son enfant de la *baboue* et du marmot.

Eduquer par la peur

Un exemple de cette pratique pédagogique est documenté au XVI^e siècle, il est tiré de la 24 *Sérée* (soirée) 'Des nourrices', de Guillaume Bouchet:

Et puis les vieilles nourrices conteront aux petits enfans indifféremment toutes sortes de fables: ce que défend Platon, de peur, dit-il que leurs ames de ce commencement ne s'abreuvent point de folie et de mauvaise opinion, qui pourroit engendrer aux enfans quelque vaine crainte et folle superstition. Aussi que ces vieilles s'aydent des Démons, se montrant en forme de femmes monstrueuses, par le moyen desquelles les nourrices empechent leurs petits enfans de crier ou de sortir dehors. Et nous trouvons en Théocrite qu'une femme nourrice menace son enfant de la *Babouë* ou du Marmot: dont est tiré le mot François marmot, estant Mormo, un espouvantail d'enfans.²⁴

²¹ François Rabelais, *Le Quart-Livre*, édition Robert Marichal (Lille-Genève: Le Quart-Livre, 1947), pp. 230 et 349.

²² *Dictionnaire universel de français et latin, appelé Dictionnaire de Trévoux, contenant la signification et la définition des mots de l'une et l'autre langue*, 8 vols (7^e édition de Paris, 1771), I, 684.

²³ 'Fantôme sans existence réelle': Berlioz, 'Masques', p. 231.

²⁴ Guillaume Bouchet (1513–94), 24^e *Sérée* (1584–98). *Les Sérées de Guillaume Bouchet, sieur de Brocourt avec notices et index par C. E. Roybet, Charles Royer et Ernest Courbet*, 6 vols (Paris: Lemerre, 1873–82), IV, 68. 'Baboue', texte cité par Godefroy, *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française*, I, 544; et Edmond Huguet, *Dictionnaire de la langue française du seizième siècle*, 7 vols (Paris: A. Didier, 1925), I, 445.

Notons que les sources antiques, sur lesquelles semble s'appuyer Guillaume Bouchet, sont transcrites de Pierre Le Loyer dont les *Livres des spectres*,²⁵ associent pour la première fois des masques effrayants qui servent à menacer du croque-mitaine: 'Il n'y a plus prompt moyen pour apaiser les enfans qui crient que de leur faire monstre de masques et de les menacer de la *Baboue*.'

En d'autres termes, la *Baboue*, semble être apparue au XVI^e siècle sous la plume de Rabelais, désignant un jeu d'adultes ou de jeunes, mais aussi une pratique de nourrices (*Baboë, Marmot*) que chacun reconnaît remonter à l'Antiquité. Les nourrices menaçaient les enfants de fantômes méchants, la *Lamia* en Grèce et les *Manes* et les *Larvae* chez les romains, que l'on retrouvait dans 'les contes de nourrices'. Une larve (*larva*) est, dans son acception antique, à la fois un esprit malfaisant, celui d'un criminel par exemple prenant la forme d'un spectre pour tourmenter les vivants et un objet, un masque de théâtre à l'aspect d'un fantôme grimaçant. Un certain amusement vient se glisser au sein de ces contes car ces déités prennent des apparences grotesques (*thripes deorum*).²⁶ Cette pédagogie par la peur a été transmise de l'Antiquité aux temps modernes, durant toute la période médiévale.

Dans les recueils d'*exempla*, destinés à fournir aux prédicateurs de courtes histoires exemplaires propres à frapper les esprits, sont nommés des êtres de la famille de la *Baboue*. Ainsi, le *Barbo* cité par Etienne de Bourbon dans son *Traité de prédication* (1250–60) consacré aux *dons du Saint-Esprit*. Au troisième livre du *don de science*, dans la division consacrée à la *pénitence*, le *Barbo* apparaît en langue vernaculaire (*quod gallice dicitur Barbo*) et il est rapporté au monde de l'enfance: 'Le diable leur fait, comme l'on fait à l'enfant, ce qu'en langue vulgaire l'on appelle *barbo*, afin qu'ils reculent à la manière d'un enfant.'²⁷ Une note marginale qui accompagne les premiers manuscrits de son traité, doit faciliter le repérage, elle donne à l'attention des usagers lettrés le synonyme latin du *Barbo*: *De larva vel barbo* ('de la larve ou du *Barbo*'). La forme savante du *Barbo* serait donc *Larva* ou ses équivalents. Au VII^e siècle, Isidore de Séville, recueillant ces traditions dans ses *Etymologies*, donne toujours les *larvae* pour des esprits malfaisants, des âmes tourmentées qui murmurent dans les coins sombres et font peur aux petits enfants. Au

²⁵ Pierre Le Loyer, *III Livres des spectres, ou Histoires des spectres et visions d'esprits, anges et démons se monstrans sensiblement aux hommes* (Angers: Nepveu, 1586), in-4° (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, réserve R 7829, R-7830).

²⁶ 'LARVAE' et 'MANES', dans Charles Daremberg et Edmond Saglio, *Dictionnaire des Antiquités grecques et romaines [...]*, 10 vols (Graz: Akademische Druck und Verlagsantalt, 1963–69; facsimile de l'édition de Paris, 1877–1919), III.2, cols 950–53 et 1571–72.

²⁷ Berlioz, 'Masques', p. 223.

IX^e siècle, un moine de saint Gall en fait des démons de seconde zone, plutôt farceurs.²⁸

Une leçon destinée aux moines

Au XIII^e siècle encore, traitant de la pénitence, l'auteur anonyme de la *Tabula exemplorum* (1277), a repris le traité d'Etienne de Bourbon. Le diable fait toujours peur aux hommes comme les nourrices font aux enfants, mais le nom de cette pratique est un peu différent: le *Barbo* devient *Barbou*.

De même, note que le diable fait aux hommes qui refusent de faire pénitence, comme beaucoup font aux enfants quand ils craignent qu'ils ne courent à l'eau. Ils leur font le barbou, afin qu'ils aient peur et ne s'exposent pas au danger.

Ainsi le diable fait-il le barbou quand il montre les masques de la pénitence, c'est-à-dire les *foz usages*, à savoir la faim, la soif, les veilles et ainsi de suite, qui à la lettre, paraissent des sottises aux hommes charnels.²⁹

Pour Jacques Berlioz, l'expression *faire le Barbou*, est à rapprocher du substantif masculin *le barbeu*, désignant un être fantastique, un être verbal que Frédéric Godefroy traduit par 'loup-garou'.³⁰

L'*exemplum* d'Etienne de Bourbon consacré à la pénitence concerne en premier lieu ceux qui ont vocation d'entrer ou sont déjà dans un ordre monastique, ainsi:

Le diable leur fait comme on fait à l'enfant, ce qu'en langue vulgaire l'on appelle *Barbo*, afin qu'ils reculent à la manière d'un enfant (note marginale: *La larve et le Barbo*):

Quand ils songent à entrer dans un ordre, le diable leur oppose la dureté de cet ordre ou les difficultés qu'ils vont rencontrer.

Quand ils songent à franchir le pas (note marginale: *faire une traversée*) il leur oppose les difficultés de la route.

Quand ils songent à faire une autre pénitence, il leur oppose les difficultés qu'ils vont rencontrer pour les pousser à renoncer à leur projet ([...]) Il en sera ainsi de l'homme qui,

²⁸ Dans un texte rapporté à Charlemagne, les *Gesta Karoli Magni*, composé en 884–87; Isidorus Hispalensis, *Etymologiarum sive originum libri XX*, XI, 1, éd. par Wallace Martin Lindsay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1911), cités par Berlioz, 'Masques', pp. 226–27.

²⁹ Cité de Jean-Thibaut Welter, *La Tabula exemplorum secundum ordinem alphabeti: recueil d'exempla compilé en France à la fin du XIII^e Siècle* (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1973), p. 62, cité par Berlioz, 'Masques', p. 228.

³⁰ Berlioz, 'Masques', p. 224.

dans le moment présent ne veut pas faire pénitence et qui dans le futur sera puni de tous les supplices.³¹

Les trois expressions ‘quand ils songent’ (*cum cogitant*), désignent trois temps de discernement qui scandent la vie consacrée. Celui de la vocation initiale et du choix d’un ordre; puis les hésitations des débuts devant la dureté de cette vie qui s’ouvre et enfin les tentations face à un temps de pénitence particulier. Trois temps où le diable tente l’homme afin de le faire renoncer. Or la pénitence, loin d’être un exercice vain et stérile, est le moyen privilégié de rachat du pécheur afin, comme le dit Etienne de Bourbon ‘de se hâter vers la société des anges (*i. e. le ciel*), de tendre vers l’héritage perdu [...] le bonheur promis (*i. e. la vie éternelle*)’. ‘Faire une traversée’ (*Transfretare*) est une référence biblique évoquant le passage et la traversée de l’eau, la vie humaine et la vocation monastique, par référence à la vocation apostolique (Mt 14. 34, Mc 6. 53). La dernière partie de l’*exemplum* semble élargir la leçon à tous les hommes assujettis à la pénitence, ceux qu’Etienne de Bourbon nomme ‘les hommes charnels’ qui, assaillis par le diable, se comportent non en adultes mais en petits enfants qu’un leurre ou un conte de nourrice effraye. Dans cet *exemplum* d’Etienne de Bourbon, le diable montre tous les inconvénients de la vie monastique pour ‘faire reculer’ l’homme, le détourner de sa vocation, le faire renoncer. Ce qui est fustigé ici, ce sont les vocations tièdes, la couardise, la paresse qui conduisent à renoncer ou à remettre au lendemain. Au lieu de courir à la suite du Christ en athlètes de la foi (1 Co 9. 24), ils s’enfuient.

Dans l’*exemplum* de la *Tabula exemplorum*, le diable en personne, mauvaise nourrice, fait la *Babou* (ou bien le *Barbou*, le *Barbo* ou le *Barbeu*), *en montrant les masques* (*Larvas*) de la pénitence. C’est dans ce combat quotidien contre les tentations diaboliques que s’engagent les moines, la prière au chœur, l’office divin et les oraisons particulières en sont les lieux. Trop humains, ‘hommes charnels’, les moines qui s’arrêtent aux apparences, et ne voient que les inconvénients de leur vie régulière, très malin le diable qui agit ces inconvénients comme de réels dangers. Mais c’est se comporter en enfant que de croire aux fables de nourrices, à la réalité des épouvantails. Pourquoi perdre toute son éternité pour une minute de confort ou de plaisir en cédant à la peur, à la tentation de ne voir qu’absurdités dans les rigueurs de la règle monastique?

³¹ Traduction de l’édition établie à partir du ms le plus ancien connu du *Traité de prédication*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS lat. 15970, fol. 250 c,d, édition et traduction de Berlioz, ‘Masques’, p. 233.

Si les stalles de chœur, portant de nombreuses images de grimaces, sont le reflet tardif de ces enseignements par *exempla*,³² ne peut-on voir dans ces nombreuses figures de *Baboues*, autant de rappels des pauvres masques que brandit le démon pour détourner les moines de la pénitence?

Cependant il est difficile d'imaginer, pour les sources citées, si les nourrices utilisaient des masques ou des épouvantails (*Marmots*),³³ ou seulement la menace d'êtres terrifiant comme le Loup-garou ou le Croquemitaine 'que l'on invoquait pour effrayer les enfants dans l'intention de les éloigner d'un danger pour les faire obéir'.³⁴

Des masques

Les enquêtes étymologiques et les pratiques postérieures au Moyen Âge, peuvent peut-être nous permettre de mieux comprendre ce que recouvrent les expressions, 'faire (le) *Barbo*' au Moyen Âge puis 'faire (la) *Baboue*' aux temps modernes. Selon Walter von Wartburg, la *Baboue* possède une vaste famille onomatopéique. À partir de la racine *Bau*, une onomatopée qui, redoublée, donne les formes primitives de *bau-bau* ou de *beu-beu* se sont multipliées les formes et variantes, ainsi les formes gallo-romanes du 'type *Babou*', les *bâbou*, *bâbeû* etc.³⁵ Jusqu'à la période contemporaine, et dans le domaine wallon, les mots *bâbeû* ou *beûbeû* signifient 'masque d'apiculteur'.³⁶ Ces masques, dématérialisant totalement les visages, les prolongeant par un pan flottant, ont un aspect effrayant dont Bruegel donne un aperçu éloquent.³⁷ Nous avons vu que les noms de la famille de la *Baboue* (*Baboë*, *Babouye*, *Babau* ...), que l'on trouve dans la littérature à partir du XVI^e siècle, dérivent de la racine *bab*- grimace. Les dictionnaires citent parmi les locutions, que l'on ne peut

³² Nous avons essayé de démontrer que des *exempla* sont les sources d'images de stalle, images tenues un peu rapidement comme, profanes et quotidiennes. Sylvie Bethmont-Gallerand, 'Selon le temps', dans *Bible de bois du Moyen Âge, Profane Arts*, vol. XI (Angers-Paris: UCO-l'Harmattan, 2003), pp. 37–64; et 'Le Monde et le moine', *Bulletin archéologique du C.T.H.S.*, 31–32 (2005), 73–117.

³³ 'Baboe', dans Godefroy, *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française*, I, 544.

³⁴ Selon la définition de C. Joisten cité par Berlioz, 'Masques', p. 221.

³⁵ Von Wartburg, *Französisches*, I, 297b–298a, cité par Berlioz, 'Masques', p. 229.

³⁶ Berlioz, 'Masques', p. 230.

³⁷ *Les Apiculteurs*, Pierre Bruegel l'Ancien, vers 1568, dessin à la plume et encre brune, Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett, KdZ 713.

prononcer sans grimacer ou avancer les lèvres, un objet matériel, la *Babouiniere* (*Chroniques de Saint-Denys*), masque cornu et barbu, qui porte un nom dérivé lui aussi de la racine *bab-*.³⁸

Des masques barbuis

Dans cette même famille apparaît donc une barbe. C'est sans doute celle du *Barbo* du XIII^e siècle dont fait usage Etienne de Bourbon, mais aussi l'ancien français *Barbeu*. Comment glisse-t-on d'une *Baboue* à un *Barbou* (*Barbeu*). Sans doute par une simple proximité phonétique. 'D'où cette hypothèse, ayant remarqué que les masques à barbe terrifiaient les enfants, les mots les désignant n'auraient-ils pas contaminé, du fait de leur proximité phonétique, les formes primitives *bau-bau* ou *bau-beu* (*formes gallo-romanes du type Babou*), ces dernières devenant *Barbo* (au Moyen Âge) ou *Barbeu*?'³⁹ Les formes primitives ayant ainsi été 'contaminées' par les mots désignant les masques à barbe.

Guillaume d'Auvergne, évêque de Paris (1228–49), dans son traité sur les mœurs, parle à plusieurs reprises de ce que qu'Etienne de Bourbon nomme *Barbo*. Mais il le désigne de divers noms latins évoquant des personnages barbus qui semblent à eux seuls propres à inspirer la terreur. Ainsi du *Barbualdus* que Guillaume montre à 'ses petits enfants' (*puerulos meos, parvulos meos*),⁴⁰ ceux qui sont enseignés dans les écoles ou les monastères. C'est une 'figure ou une peinture terrible' que les mères ou nourrices montrent aux tout-petits pour les écarter du danger.⁴¹ Du Cange en donne la définition pour *Barbuda*: 'masque placé sur le visage pour effrayer les enfants'. Ailleurs chez cet auteur, le *Babrenaldus* désigne le fouet, les verges ou un épouvantail et *Barbuardi* 'des choses terribles' pour inspirer la terreur aux petits enfants.⁴² De même au XIII^e siècle parlait-on de *barbeoir*, de *berboire* ou de *babeoire*, pour désigner des masques ayant une barbe.⁴³ Et le diable, le *Barbou* moyen français, est avant tout barbu en ses représentations iconiques.

³⁸ Godefroy, *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française*, I, 545.

³⁹ Berlioz, 'Masques', p. 230.

⁴⁰ Du Cange, *Glossarium mediae et infimae latinitatis*, I (Paris, 1883; 1^e édn, 1678), p. 590.

⁴¹ Guillaume d'Auvergne, *De moribus*, 2, 195 aB–C; et 5, 1, 211 a A–B; cité par Alexandre-Bidon et Berlioz, 'Le Masque et la barbe', pp. 167–68.

⁴² Guillaume d'Auvergne, *De Tentationibus*, 4, 1, 308 aE, et *De Universo*, II-2, 1, 101 4bH; Alexandre-Bidon et Berlioz, 'Le Masque et la barbe', pp. 168 et 169.

⁴³ Godefroy, *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française*, I, 580.

Les images de la *Baboue* (à partir de la fin du XV^e siècle), ou du *Barbo* (si ce terme peut désigner des images antérieures, modillons par exemples), répondent à cette diversité sémantique. Les différents aspects des objets matériels que les sources semblent désigner, permettent de tracer une première typologie de celles des stalles, mais il n'est pas dans ce propos d'en faire l'inventaire qui pourra être l'objet d'un travail ultérieur au sein de *Misericordia International*.

*Typologie des images de stalles*⁴⁴

Un modèle antique, décapitation et frontalité

Une parfaite identité formelle lie les images antiques de la tête tranchée de Méduse et les miséricordes présentant des visages isolés et grimaçants. Une miséricorde des stalles de la cathédrale de Bâle possède tous les traits de Méduse décapitée, formant un masque dont les origines antiques sont à peine altérées par la barbe et les cheveux ondoyants (Figure 61). Une même frontalité indique le caractère démoniaque de ces figures comme le rappelle Michel Pastoureau. Les pavillons des oreilles encadrent les épaisses sinuosités rythmées des chairs déformées autour d'une bouche ouverte et grimaçante, ourlée de lèvres épaisses, celles du masque tragique (*Larva*). Les sculpteurs médiévaux en trouvaient les prototypes dans la statuaire, les sarcophages, les ruines ou les manuscrits comme ceux de TERENCE dont Jean Adhémar souligne l'identité formelle avec les chapiteaux romans.⁴⁵ Avec ses sœurs Sthéno et Euryalé, Méduse, habitait près du royaume des morts, à l'extrême ouest de toute terre habitée.⁴⁶ Méduse la seule des trois gorgones à être mortelle, avait une tête entourée de serpents et ses yeux étincelants changeaient en pierre tout être vivant. Bien conseillé par Athéna, Persée se sert de son bouclier poli pour éviter de regarder directement Méduse et ainsi peut-il lui trancher la tête. Mais la tête de

⁴⁴ Malgré sa proximité phonétique et son rôle de *fascinum* proche de celui de notre grimace, l'antique Baubô dont il existe des images marginales médiévales ne sera pas envisagée ici, pas plus que le jeu de masques barbus dont la proximité avec ce corpus doit être notée. A ce sujet, voir Jean Wirth, *Les Marges à drôleries des manuscrits gothiques* (Genève: Droz, 2008), p. 140, et Alexandre-Bidon, 'Fonction'.

⁴⁵ Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS. lat 7899, fol. 3; J. Adhémar, *Influences antiques de l'art du Moyen Âge, recherches des sources et des thèmes d'inspiration* (Paris: Éditions du CTHS, 1996; 1^{re} édition, 1939), p. 202 et figs 66–67.

⁴⁶ 'Gorgone', dans Pierre Grimal, *Dictionnaire de la Mythologie grecque et romaine* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1951), p. 168.

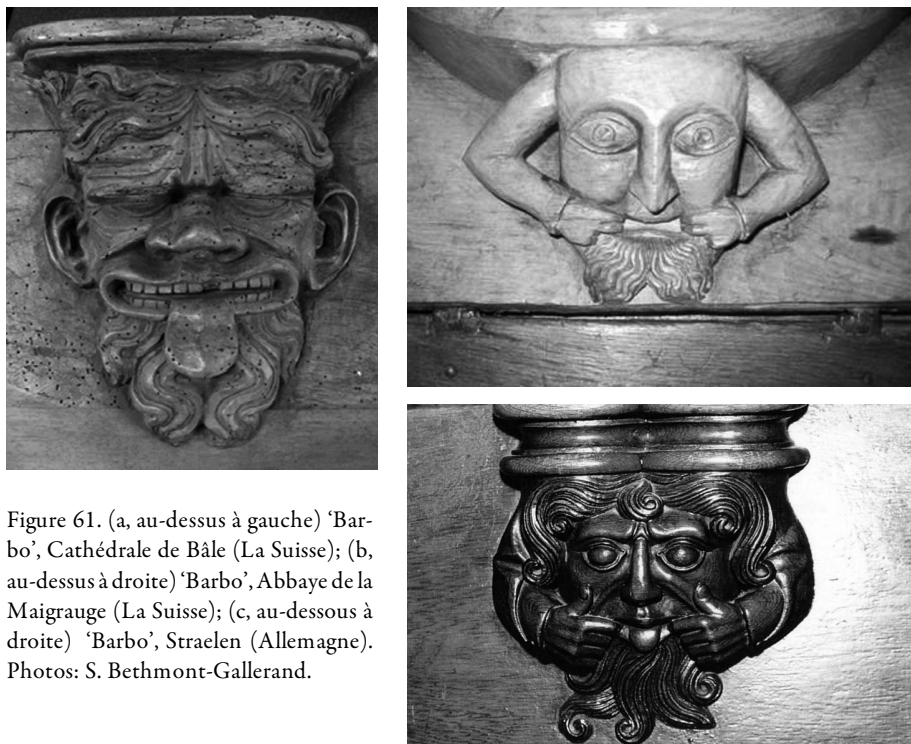


Figure 61. (a, au-dessus à gauche) 'Barbo', Cathédrale de Bâle (La Suisse); (b, au-dessus à droite) 'Barbo', Abbaye de la Maigrauge (La Suisse); (c, au-dessous à droite) 'Barbo', Straelen (Allemagne). Photos: S. Bethmont-Gallerand.

cette gorgone morte garde ses pouvoirs terrifiants, une seule boucle de cheveux pouvant mettre en déroute une armée entière. Athéna plaçant cette tête décapitée au centre de son égide peut ainsi transformer en pierre tous ses ennemis.

Regarder peut-être mortel. Dans le cas de la gorgone, le reflet, l'image conserve les pouvoirs du prototype. Lieux de mémoire les images ont aussi des vertus apotropaïques, que Nurith Kenaan-Kedar a évoqués pour les modillons et Ruth Mellinkoff pour les *marginalia* médiévaux.⁴⁷ Il s'agit moins de repousser le mal, le diable et ses démons, à l'extérieur d'un édifice comme cela a été indiqué pour les modillons, mais surtout d'attirer l'attention, de fasciner ces êtres malfaisants et

⁴⁷ En particulier à propos de têtes coupées représentant des ennemis décapités, Nurith Kenaan-Kedar, *Marginal Sculpture in Medieval France: Toward the Deciphering of an Enigmatic Pictorial Language* (Aldershot: Scolar, 1995), pp. 15–17. De nombreux exemples de *Barbo-Baboue*, dans la sculpture et les enluminures sont donnés dont Ruth Mellinkoff, *Averting Demons: The Protective Power of Medieval Visual Motifs and Themes*, 2 vols (Los Angeles: Ruth Mellinkoff, 2004), 1, 103–08.



Figure 62. (a, à gauche) ‘Musicien et Baboue’, Cloître de Pampelune (1280–1340) (Espagne); (b, à droite) ‘Musicien et Baboue’, Cloître de Pampelune (1280–1340) (Espagne), détail.

Photos: Dr Santiago Hidalgo, reproduced by permission.

‘fascinateurs’ en leur montrant des scènes amusantes ou étranges (*fascinatum*). C’est la thèse de Ruth Mellinkof, qui s’applique aussi aux images situées à l’intérieur des édifice, au plus près du sanctuaire dans le cas des stalles, ou bien au sein des livres pieux, dans les *marginalia*. Ce pouvoir apotropaïque des images était connu dès l’antiquité: ‘l’aspect étrange attire le regard du fascinateur et l’empêche ainsi de se fixer sur sa victime’.⁴⁸ Les images de stalles ne sont pas isolées, elles entrent dans le champ immense de l’iconographie dite ‘profane’ des enseignes, des plafonds peints, poutres et entrails des édifices civils et religieux de la fin du Moyen Âge, auxquelles la leçon exemplaire et sa morale peuvent être appliquées. Ainsi sur un culot un masque de *Barbo* portant l’image d’un musicien dans un quadrilobe ornant le cloître de Pampelune (1280–1340) peut-être placé en ce lieu de prière pour fasciner les démons (Figure 62).⁴⁹

Tirer la langue

Si Méduse tire la langue ce n’est pas par facétie ou dérision comme nos modernes garnements, mais bien par réflexe *in articulo moris*, ce qui contribue à son pouvoir de fascination. Par glissement, tirer la langue devient un mimique propre aux êtres démoniaques, aux personnifications du mal, sur les modillons en particulier. Dans

⁴⁸ Plutarque, *Propos de table*, V.7. 3, *Œuvres morales*, vol. IX, 2^e partie (Paris: F. Fuhrmann, 1978); cité par Denis Bruna, *Enseignes de plomb et autres menues choses du Moyen Âge* (Paris: Le Léopard d’Or, 2006), p. 203.

⁴⁹ Je remercie Santiago Hidalgo de l’université de Lille-3, dont les travaux portent sur les sculptures du cloître de Pampelune, pour m’avoir aimablement fait connaître ces images.

les images de la Passion du Christ, ce faciès grimaçant est un *topos* parmi les bourreaux du Christ assimilés au démon. Leurs traits sont délibérément simiesques avec des lèvres épaisses, aux *babines* retroussées. Les visages sont noirs ou présentent les caractéristiques de la caricature du juif avec un nez crochu souligné par un vue de profil et une barbe de bouc. Sur une enluminure du missel de Chichester, les apôtres (dont Judas) et le Christ ont la peau claire et le visage harmonieux. Ils se détachent de la troupe hideuse des gardes, ‘tout à la fois juifs et noirs’, tirant la langue, grimaçant de toutes leurs dents, exprimant qu’en cette heure tragique ‘il fait nuit’ tant plan temporel que spirituel.⁵⁰ Parmi les signes de dérision les bourreaux du Christ peuvent faire la *Baboue* et d’autres grimaces à caractère sexuel, comme la *figue* (*fica*).⁵¹

La langue tirée permet, en outre de mettre en valeur cet organe d’où peut venir ‘le pire et le meilleur’. Une gravure de la *Nef des fous*, de Sébastien Brant, illustre ‘des propose trop bavards’ par un fou et sa marotte tirant la langue vers un nid de pивert. Paraphrasant l’épître de Jacques (3. 5–12), ‘La langue est un membre minuscule et elle peut se glorifier de grandes choses! [...] Par elle nous bénissons le Seigneur et Père et par elle nous maudissons les hommes faits à l’image de Dieu’, Sébastien Brant accumule les sentences:

Et tel serait tenu pour sage
Si sa langue ne lui nuisait:
Pивert trahit du propre bec
Sa nichée avec ses petits.
Silence vaut parfois réponse,
Qui parle trop se fait du tort.
Le membre ténu qu’est la langue
Peut causer de très grands dommages,
Il peut vous souiller tout un homme.⁵²

Le bavardage oisieux est cadénassé sur une miséricorde de l’église Saint-Maurille des Ponts-de-Cé à laquelle fait écho une allégorie de *la femme parfaite*, une gravure d’Anton Woensam, datée de 1525. Les folkloristes évoquent Sainte Caquette, ou

⁵⁰ Katerina Sténou, *Images de l’Autre, la différence, du mythe au préjugé* (Paris: Le Seuil, éditions de l’UNESCO, 1998), p. 85.

⁵¹ ‘Fascinum’, dans Daremberg et Saglio, *Dictionnaire des Antiquités*, II, col. 983.

⁵² ‘Des propos trop bavards’, Sébastien Brant, *La nef des fous* (Paris: Corti, 1997; répr. 2004), vv. 21–29, pp. 66–67.



Figure 63. (a, à gauche) 'Babils', Moudon (La Suisse); (b, à droite) 'Babils', Estavayer-le-Lac (La Suisse). Photos: S. Bethmont-Gallerand.

sainte Babille (*sic*),⁵³ mais, plus sûrement, les auteurs des stalles ont dénoncé par ce motif le 'péché de langue',⁵⁴ le bavardage, le huitième péché dont au VII^e siècle, Grégoire le Grand avait posé les fondements. Il n'est pas l'apanage des femmes et en monde monastique le '*multiloquium*', qui dissipe l'intériorité et rompt le dialogue avec Dieu, représente un danger mortel pour l'âme. Signes d'avertissement d'autres personnages, des hommes à la bouche cadénassée, ornent des miséricordes de Moudon et d'Estavayer-le-Lac, en Suisse (Figure 63).

Les Doigts dans la bouche

Les personnages de stalles font la Baboue en étirant les commissures des lèvres. Ils semblent vouloir avaler leurs mains entières sur les miséricordes du musée national du Moyen Âge, Thermes et Hôtel de Cluny, à Paris (Figure 64c), ou de Sainte-Menehoulde de Palluau (Indre). Mais le prototype de cette grimace est de se servir d'un seul doigt de chaque côté (Figure 64h et 64i), ce qui permet de tirer la langue, peut-être en l'agitant et en émettant des sons.

⁵³ Claude Gaignebet et Jean-Dominique Lajoux, *Art profane et religion populaire au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1885); Bruno Roy, 'Sainte Caquette', dans *Cy nous dient, Dialogue avec quelques auteurs médiévaux*, *Medievalia*, 28 (Orléans: Paradigme, 1999), pp. 115–22.

⁵⁴ Carla Casagrande et Silvana Vecchio, *Le Péché de la langue, discipline et éthique de la parole dans la culture médiévale*, trad. par Philippe Baillet (Paris: Le Cerf, 1991), pp. 12–13, voir aussi Bethmont-Gallerand et Leduc, 'Le Diable, les bavardes et les clercs', p. 219.

Figure 64. (a, à droite) 'Fou-Baboue', Ulm, cathédrale (Allemagne); (b, au 2^e rang, à gauche) 'Fou-Baboue', Ulm, cathédrale (Allemagne); (c, au 2^e rang, à droite) 'Fou-Baboue', Musée national du Moyen Âge, Paris (France); (d, au 3^e rang, à gauche) 'Fou-Baboue', Abbaye-Blanche, Mortain (France); (e, au 3^e rang, à droite) 'Fou-Baboue', Saint-Michel-le-Notariat, Blainville-Crévon (France); (f, au 4^e rang, à gauche) 'Fou-Baboue', Gif-sur-Yvette (France); (g, au 4^e rang, à droite) 'Fou-Baboue', Beverley Minster (Yorkshire, GB); (h, au 5^e rang, à gauche) 'Fou-Baboue', Beverley Minster (Yorkshire, GB); (i, au 5^e rang, à droite) 'Fou-Baboue', San Salvador, Celanova (Ecuador).



Photos:
S. Bethmont-
Gallerand.

Sainte folie

‘Qui hante les enfants et les fous | Trouve bonnes leurs facéties’, dit Sébastien Brant,⁵⁵ ces lunatiques sont comparés et associés dans les locutions proverbiales et les images de la fin du Moyen Âge. Malcolm Jones relie cette grimace à la figure des fous des miséricordes de Beverley Minster (1520). L’un fait la *Baboue* et un autre tire la commissure droite d’un index en posant l’autre doigt sur son orbite. Ces images de folie ne sont pas celles dénoncées par le psaume du *Dixit Insipiens* (Ps 52),⁵⁶ ni des fous de cour, mais la figure de la stupidité, en d’autres termes l’idiot du village, bête comme une oie, un doigt dans la bouche: ‘Shall I stand still, like a goose or a fool, with my finger in my mouth?’⁵⁷ (Figure 64).

Vers la rationalité moderne

Les bénéficiaires des techniques pédagogiques par intimidation étaient d’abord des petits enfants puis des écoliers. Et les *exempla*, destinés aux adultes, étaient autant de rappels de l’enfance pour dénoncer les manœuvres du diable tout en brandissant la peur de l’enfer et de la damnation éternelle. Au XVI^e siècle dans le *Livre des spectres* de Pierre Le Loyer utilise toujours l’image de la pratique pédagogique du croquemitaine. Mais c’est ici l’Église, *mater ecclesia*, patiente éducatrice qui montre la laideur du mal aux âmes croyantes: ‘l’Église est comme la bonne mère, laquelle, pour faire taire son enfant opiniâtre, le menace de la *Baboue* et du loup’.

Les temps ont changé, l’humour à double détente contenu dans la leçon médiévale des *exempla* du *Traité de la pénitence* d’Etienne de Bourbon (1250–71), ou de *la Tabula exemplorum* (1277), permettait de comprendre combien le diable avance de piètres arguments, tout justes bons à inspirer la peur aux petits enfants et aux fous qui leurs ressemblent. A partir du XVI^e siècle la lecture se fait simple, voire simpliste, le démon est effrayant et malfaisant, l’Église le montre comme tel, laid comme la *Baboue*, noir comme le loup. Et le croquemitaine à barbe c’est le diable ce noir prédateur. Le laïc, appelé à recevoir cette leçon, est heureux de se confier à l’Église comme à sa mère et de se faire tout-petit.

Elaine, Christa, in memori

⁵⁵ Brant, *La nef des fous*, p. 198.

⁵⁶ Muriel Laharie, *La Folie au Moyen Âge, XI^e–XIII^e siècles* (Paris: Le Léopard d’Or, 1991).

⁵⁷ Jones, *Secret Middle Ages*, pp. 114–15.

BLINGY WOMEN, SAINT JEROME'S MIRTH,
AND GRUBBY DEVILS:
PLAY AND THE OLD FRENCH *VIE DES PÈRES*

Adrian P. Tudor

Elaine C. Block's lifelong research interests may be placed broadly in the area of the 'profane arts', but she consistently acknowledged how foolish it was for scholars to consider 'profane' and 'sacred' as two wholly unconnected entities: interest in the one necessarily implies an understanding of the other. Why else might she have had the wisdom in 2004 to attend a conference at the University of Pittsburgh on the *Miracles des Nostre Dame* composed by the Benedictine monk Gautier de Coinci in the thirteenth century? The subject of this paper, the Old French *Vie des Pères*, is from the *Miracles* and was well known to Elaine. Indeed, it too occupies a literary generic, and at times thematic, grey area not entirely dissimilar to the artistic, conceptual, and iconographical grey area occupied by misericords, which were church carvings bearing witness to a general expression of profane arts and profane culture in a sacred space. The Old French *Vie des Pères* is occasionally similarly incongruous. Copied into both illustrated and non-illustrated manuscripts, these pious stories, whose intention is clearly to edify and entertain, sometimes occupy an entire codex, elsewhere finding themselves in miscellanies alongside more overtly courtly texts.¹ My aim is briefly to consider the

¹ A quite fundamental argument was posited by Richard Trachsler in 'Uncourtly Texts in Courtly Books: Observations on MS Chantilly, Musée Condé 475', in *Courtly Arts and the Art of Courtliness: Selected Papers from the Eleventh Triennial Congress of the International Courtly Literature Society, University of Wisconsin-Madison 29 July–4 August 2004*, ed. by Keith Busby and Christopher Kleinhenz (Cambridge: Brewer, 2006), pp. 679–92. MS Condé 475 is an exceptionally interesting manuscript which challenges traditional scholarly positions, being just one which contains a mixture of conventional 'courtly' texts alongside apparently more 'popular' forms such

complex relationship between laughter, comedy, and play as exemplified in one tale from the fundamentally serious, devout, and poetic text which continues quite undeservedly to find itself somewhat in the margins of the Old French literary canon. I will illustrate how the personality and playfulness of the Middle Ages can be just as present in apparently dry texts — short pious narratives — as under the areses of medieval monks.

The *Vie des Pères* is not a translation of the *Vitae patrum*; nor is it a work of traditional hagiography. It is a thirteenth-century collection of pious tales and miracles which, in its fullest form (the primitive text plus two continuations) comprises some seventy-three or seventy-four individual narratives.² The first forty-one tales were composed in the first third of the thirteenth century by a single anonymous author with strong Cistercian sympathies. If one were to include fragments, some fifty-odd (mostly thirteenth- and fourteenth-century) manuscript witnesses survive. Most extant manuscripts offer rubrics and/or *tituli*, and a small but significant number are adorned with illustrations ranging from the modest to the relatively lavish. The latitude afforded by the author's role as popular hagiographer reveals more about him, and perhaps about his audience and those who worked on the manuscripts, than about the legends of which he tells. The author embroiders patristic legend, Marian miracles, *exempla*, and stories of his own composition into something of a blockbuster. A work at the intersection of many traditions, the *Vie des Pères* is concerned with historical accuracy only in as much as that it establishes *auctoritas* for the tales it tells and the sermons it preaches. It is this intermingling of biblical commentary and Church propaganda with individual reflection and bias evidently born out of personal experience, along with its obvious popularity and rich manuscript history, that gives the text something of a unique character as a

as epic and fabliaux, and also *Miracles de Nostre Dame* by Gautier de Coinci and some tales from the *Vie des Pères*. See also seminal works by Richard H. Rouse and Mary A. Rouse, *Illiterati et uxorati. Manuscripts and their Makers: Commercial Book Producers in Medieval Paris, 1200–1500*, 2 vols (Turnhout: Harvey Miller, 2000), and Keith Busby, *Codex and Context: Reading Old French Verse Narrative in Manuscript*, Faux Titre, 221–22 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002).

² Cf. *La Vie des Pères*, ed. by Félix Lecoy, 3 vols (Paris: Société des Anciens Textes Français, 1987–99); Adrian P. Tudor, *Tales of Vice and Virtue: The First Old French 'Vie des Pères'*, Faux Titre, 253 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005); Adrian P. Tudor, 'Texte, contexte, paratexte: la première *Vie des Pères*', *Reinardus*, 18 (2005), 131–41; Michel Zink, *Poésie et conversion au Moyen Âge*, Perspectives Littéraires (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2003); Claudio Galderisi, *Diegesis: études sur la poétique des motifs narratifs au Moyen Âge (de la 'Vie des Pères' aux lettres modernes)*, Culture et Société Médiévales, 7 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005); Elisabeth Pinto-Mathieu, *La Vie des Pères: genèse des contes religieux du XIII^e siècle* (Paris: Champion, 2009).

barometer of popular belief. The *Vie des Pères* naturally concentrates on the miracles performed by the Divine and the saints, but it highlights even more those miracles from the perspective of pious, often modest, characters who have obeyed Lateran IV and have repented in conformity to canon law. Parts of the text should be read as hagiography of and for the recognizable, the humble, the modest, and the unnamed. The text deals with deeds rather than with names — indeed, many of its saints, and all of those figuring in its most successful tales, are not named at all. The character/type is far more important than the individual. Character types common to a wider variety of strands of medieval literature and culture are represented here: the confessor, the cunning devil, and the penitent may be stock characters in pious texts and sermons, but the knight and his quest are more common to romance, and nagging wives, weak husbands, and worldly monks seem to come straight from the comic tradition. Indeed, notwithstanding the primary and sincere objective of the text, which is to pass on a message of salvation, there are close manuscript and thematic links with courtly literature, with the Virgin miracle tradition, and with the comic fabliaux.³ The saints are rarely the central characters of our tales, their glory being reflected in the salvation of others. The *Vie des Pères* does not promote the veneration of the saints, but it does furnish recognizable and accessible examples of how holy men and women in the past and in the present helped others to salvation. It was not designed to foster devotion to the saints, rather to promote the sacrament of penance, and is consequently a devotional text with practical and even realistic implications which does not pretend to be critical or historical in its purpose. Put simply, the text is not a collection of biographies, but rather of examples to follow that are, when it comes down to it, within the reach of all. Despite finding itself at the confluence of cultures, logic suggests that on the face of it there might be little in such short pious narratives to encourage the scholar seeking examples of the playfulness of the Middle Ages.

When reading a proselytizing (and long) text such as the *Vie des Pères*, it is easy to lose sight of the many facets of authorship, performance/reading, physical and

³ Fabliaux, miracles, and *exempla* were far from mutually exclusive: the invaluable codicological work of Busby, a potentially controversial article by John F. Levy, 'Le vilain asnier, a "perfect little exemplum"', *Reinardus*, 19 (2007), 107–27, and the brilliant 'Or escoutez une merveille! Parallel Paths: Gautier de Coinci and the Fabliaux', in *Gautier de Coinci: Miracles, Music, and Manuscripts*, ed. by Kathy M. Krause and Alison Stones, *Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe*, 13 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), pp. 331–43, in which Brian J. Levy reverses Jacques Ribard's famous question to wonder, 'Et si les miracles de Gautier n'étaient pas des contes pieux ...?', are all recent additions to a long bibliography which substantiates this.

cultural context, and reception. The message conveyed may indeed be one of Christian salvation, but this hardly excludes the possibility of play. After all, although play may have no place in liturgy, there is any number of examples of playfulness being important to spreading the Christian word in the Middle Ages. One of the most famous of such instances in many ways valorizes the current essay and regards an *exemplum* attributed to Caesarius of Heisterbach. At the turn of the thirteenth century an abbot was preaching to a congregation of monks and lay brothers; however, the audience was not very receptive. Suddenly the abbot raised his voice, exclaiming: 'My brothers! Listen carefully, because I am going to tell you a story all about King Arthur!'⁴ Suddenly everyone's ears pricked up, but the audience was to be disappointed, for the abbot continued to berate them that they should be ashamed of themselves. He was preaching words of salvation, but elicited no interest until he mentioned the name of a character associated with entertaining rather than edifying material. The abbot was deadly serious: he was anxious to save the souls of his brothers, but he wisely understood that in order to gain their attention he needed to introduce an element of play.

As has been noted over the past hundred years or so, playfulness, comedy, and laughter are interrelated but not necessarily synonymous. What is more, the presence of any or all of these concepts does not prohibit the transmission of a serious message. Comedy and laughter have been thoroughly studied both in philosophical terms and with regard to their relationship with medieval literature and culture. Henri Bergson's analysis of what makes us laugh, and how, is much cited and challenged but remains a useful starting point for our purposes, notably in his emphasis on the social function of laughter.⁵ Sources of laughter — comedic instances — can be manifold in nature, but laughter itself cannot exist outside the context of society. Society functions in a mechanical way (not unlike laughter and comedy), and tends to organize people into categories. Bergson notes that for a person to be a member of a category s/he needs to acquire all the characteristics that membership entails, and any deviation from these characteristics can invoke laughter and comedy (a clear illustration of this theory can be found in the medieval story I will later study). Again, this notion of mechanisms being the very essence of comedy has been discussed, debated, and contested by medievalists and philosophers; it is inevitably linked to concepts of exclusion, subversion, and (by extension) Carnival.

⁴ Caesarius of Heisterbach's *exemplum* is entitled, *De domino Gevardo Abbate, qui monachos in sermone dormitantes per fabulam Arcturi excitavit*, in *Dialogus miraculorum*, ed. by Joseph Strange (Cologne: Hebeele, 1851), 4: Capitulum 36 (p. 205).

⁵ Henri Bergson, *Le Rire: essai sur la signification du comique* (Paris: Alcan, 1920).

Bernadette Rey-Flaud's influential structural analysis of medieval French farce is just one example which both takes issue with and depends upon Bergson's thesis.⁶ Others have highlighted the liberating role played by laughter, a role which brings us that much closer to the notion of playfulness. Bakhtinian theory posited the existence of a potentially subversive, unofficial ideology running contrary to 'official' culture.⁷ This opened up fresh approaches to the study of late medieval culture in particular.⁸ Just as significantly, Peter Stallybrass and Allan White noted that 'Carnival' can be interpreted as both an expression of liberation and as a reinforcement of a conservative ideology.⁹ The *Vie des Pères* is not subversive, articulating in fact a profoundly orthodox faith and intention. It does take issue with clerical abuses, thereby questioning the values of the establishment, but this hardly excludes the possibility of playfulness on the part of the author and/or his characters. The author is acutely aware that an audience may enjoy the vehicle without embracing the message. On the other hand, he is realistic, quite brilliant, and an excellent observer of human behaviour.

As far as manuscript culture is concerned, it can still be disconcerting even for scholars familiar with the culture of the Middle Ages to come across a pious book containing apparently profane material. Michael Camille's controversial but widely influential work on marginality arguably did much to demystify the playfulness of the 'profane' in otherwise holy spaces. Camille argued that as the Middle Ages progressed (beyond the composition of the *Vie des Pères*, but not necessarily the manufacture of *Vie des Pères* manuscripts) there became less and less reason for the margins to subvert mainstream culture, since the mainstream now clearly distinguished 'low' from 'high' culture. This is to suggest that at least one expression of the playfulness of the Middle Ages waned as society transformed.¹⁰ But playfulness did not of course disappear. Many years before Camille, Johan Huizinga's *Homo*

⁶ Bernadette Rey-Flaud, *La Farce ou la machine à rire: théorie d'un genre dramatique 1450–1550* (Geneva: Droz, 1984).

⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. by Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984; 1st edn, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1968).

⁸ See, for instance, *Bakhtin and Medieval Voices*, ed. by Thomas J. Farrell (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995).

⁹ Peter Stallybrass and Allan White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986).

¹⁰ Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (London: Reaktion, 1992). This interpretation is more than problematic when considering the marginal art of misericords, often dating from the transitional period that we tend to label 'medieval' to 'Renaissance'.

Ludens had employed the radical term 'Play Theory' to define the conceptual space in which play occurs. Huizinga's intention was to explore how far culture itself bears the character of play, and he concluded that play is one of the primary elements in the generation of culture.¹¹ How could the *Vie des Pères* be excluded from such an interpretation of play? It goes without saying that if Huizinga's theory obtains, all cultural manifestations, regardless of intention and motivation, have the potential to display play.

The above clearly implies that there is a fundamental difference between 'humour' and 'play'. In the Old French *fabliaux* — very much related to the *Vie des Pères* in date, form, and expression — the distinction blurs, given on the one hand a proliferation of modern theories regarding structural formulae and narratology, and on the other the complexities of this notion of 'play'.¹² But we can confidently say that playfulness in the Middle Ages does not restrict itself to carnivalesque manifestations, whether in the realm of plastic arts, drama, or literature. Nor is it necessarily the result or origin of laughter or comedy. Play has many possible functions. For example, in its purest form it is something innocent, the stuff of children and naïve minds. However, in the *Vie des Pères* there are numerous young or innocent minds which are by no means witnessed in a state of play or as a matter of form: the child thrown into an oven and saved by the Virgin in *Juitel*; the worthy pagan king who is saved even after death in *Païen*; simple monks intoning nothing but the grammatically incorrect or monotonous prayers *Miserere tui* or *Ave Maria*. Rather ironically, this mode of innocent play is more evident elsewhere in the text, in particular in the unlikely adult figure of the sophisticated, self-obsessed woman in the tale today known as *Queue*:

St Jerome is living outside Bethlehem in the company of another hermit. One day he and a colleague see a well-dressed woman who is wearing a long train. The train trails on the ground. When the woman comes to a muddy patch, she picks up her train, unaware that there is a devil riding on it. As she lifts it up to avoid the mud, the devil is thrown into a puddle. Once past the puddle, she lets down her train and the now dirty devil climbs back on board. The two holy men laugh at this scene. The woman hears them and believes that they are

¹¹ Johan Huizinga, *Homo ludens: Proeve eener bepaling van het spelelement der cultuur* (Haarlem: Tjeenk Willink, 1938); trans. by R. F. C. Hull as *Homo ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949).

¹² The most recent (and quite fascinating) work on such issues is by Roy J. Percy, *Logic and Humour in the Fabliau: An Essay in Applied Narratology*, Gallica, 7 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2007).

laughing at her. St Jerome assures her that this is not the case and explains what he has just witnessed; he also informs her that there is a second devil riding on her headdress. She understands her sin, confesses and is absolved. She vows to do away with her excessively lavish clothes. St Jerome magically renders the devils unable to move and displays them to the townsfolk.

There is a twist, of course: this proud woman — worldly, certainly no child in most ways — is totally innocent with regard to the consequences of her acts of worldliness. Life for her is a game until a serendipitous meeting with St Jerome: she is certainly not an evil, devilish character. Christian theologians, and the author of our text, might consider life itself to be a game, but not a game associated with this childish mode of play: it is a deadly serious game of salvation. There are numerous instances suggesting just this throughout the *Vie des Pères*, a text which, let us remember, is fundamentally 'une littérature de conversion'.¹³ Kings, hermits, tradesmen, woodsmen, artisans, men, women, children, monks, nuns: we are all players, and there will be winners and losers. When the game comes to an end we all need to be in favour with the eventual victor, Christ himself. In *Queue* the proud-yet-innocent woman is an insouciant player, and it is lucky for her that St Jerome teaches her the rules. This might mark the end of a state of childlike or childish play for her, but knowledge of the rules gives her every chance of being in the winner's enclosure come Judgement Day. Although a fascinating element of the narrative, St Jerome's identity is to some degree irrelevant, a motif simply bringing the woman to a state of awareness.

The *Vie des Pères* is, as we have seen, not 'standard' hagiography. We do encounter some named saints, most obviously part of a Life of Thaïs, but also in invocations and in the odd cameo appearance of other named holy people. *Thaïs* begins with the proverb, 'all that glitters is not gold', and then explains how this worldly harlot was brought to salvation by an unnamed holy hermit. Her spiritual journey from prostitute to recluse and saint is spectacular and was well-known in the Middle Ages. I would argue that this is the only truly traditional hagiography in the entire *Vie des Pères*, and even here we are dealing with 'hagiographical romance' rather than 'pure' hagiography. There is almost as much attention paid to scenes of seduction and descriptions of Thaïs's depravity as there is to her repentance, penance, and salvation. And this desire not only to preach a sermon but also to tell a good story is equally evident in a number of manuscript illustrations, all showing the pre-penitent Thaïs, a whore who attempts to seduce even the holiest

¹³ Zink, *Poésie et conversion au Moyen Âge*, p. 211.

of men. The tale may be the story of a known, named saint whose repentance is a model for the Christian audience, but the evidence of the manuscripts suggests that her sin was at least as attractive to the audience as her virtue. There may be a 'sugaring of the pill' in certain paratextual features (for example in what might appear conceptually diluted *tituli*), but as far as the author is concerned, this saint is not to be messed about with.¹⁴ Despite certain incongruities, there is little to shock or surprise us in *Thaïs*, but there are a number of narratives which do offer elements of surprise which might be associated with playfulness. This brings us back to *Queue*, an amplified and thoroughly literary exemplum.¹⁵

Jean-Charles Payen noted that 'il y a un je ne sais quoi de bon enfant dans ces pages édifiantes qui en atténue heureusement l'aspect moralisateur et dogmatique' and that this tale in particular is more 'amusing' than severe.¹⁶ The images of a playfully malevolent devil falling into the mud and of a woman dressed up to the nines coming a cropper are sure to please. This, however, does not mean that the tale neglects its moralizing function: it openly condemns the affectation and luxurious tastes of a certain type of women, and also the weakness of the men who do not keep them in line (a sort of inverse of the courtly ideal of *fin amor*). *Queue* is a variant of an *exemplum* which was apparently widespread in the Middle Ages:

A priest sees demons in the form of black mice sitting on the train of a luxuriously dressed woman. She goes home and returns to church in simple clothes.¹⁷

This classic sermon material warns women against overindulging in fineries which will drag both them and their husbands down to hell: such overindulgence — an outward sign of worldly opulence, lacking any spiritual value — will inevitably lead the married couple to lose the game of salvation. It is important to remind ourselves that *exempla* themselves played an important function in medieval society:

¹⁴ For this notion, see Busby, *Codex and Context*, vol. I.

¹⁵ The short titles were coined by Gaston Paris to avoid inevitable confusion from the number of manuscript rubrics and *tituli*. See Paris's initialled note to Edouard Schwan's influential article, 'La Vie des Anciens Pères', *Romania*, 13 (1884), 233–63 (p. 263).

¹⁶ Jean-Charles Payen, *Le Motif du repentir dans la littérature française médiévale* (Geneva: Droz, 1971), p. 555. I very briefly discussed *Queue* in 'Nos rions de votre bien: The Comic Potential of Pious Tales', in *Grant risee? The Medieval Comic Presence / La Présence comique médiévale. Essays in Memory of Brian J. Levy*, ed. by Adrian P. Tudor and Alan Hindley, *Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe*, 11 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), pp. 131–50.

¹⁷ Frederic Tubach, *Index exemplorum*, Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia Akademia Scientiarum Fennica, 1981 (Helsinki: FF Communications, 204), no. 1660.

the sermon needed to be made more attractive as a vehicle for the Christian message, and this degree of appeal was provided by the illustrative *exemplum* which, as many scholars have pointed out, hardly lacked comedic value.¹⁸ Indeed, the function of play was vital to the successful functioning of *exempla* and, by extension, sermons. As if to underline this, Jeannine Horowitz and Sophia Menache point out that the harmony between the divinity and physical reality in no way excludes laughter or comedy, rejecting only fear.¹⁹ The point is an important one: our author is adapting a short story whose purpose was both to epitomize the teaching of a potentially soul-saving sermon and to retain the attention of the listener. The evidence of composition and ulterior transmission suggests an author and book-makers fully aware of the pitfalls of the absence of a degree of entertainment from moralizing, edifying material. If playfulness is to be found to varying extents in any number of unexpected places related to the sacred — manuscript illumination and marginalia, sculptural motifs, grotesques, misericords and related church carvings, narrative surprises — then we should view *Queue* as typical rather than as an exception.²⁰

The prologue to our tale stresses the need to change our ways, appropriate both in a spiritual sense and in a more literal sense (as the lady in the tale will change her clothes). Folly — which is very closely associated with the notion of play in that something which cannot be corrected is challenged — is at the very heart of proselytizing texts such as the *Vie des Pères*. Across Old French romance and beyond we come time and again across the literal or symbolic motif of the madman ignoring the path to salvation in order to live a more comfortable life on Earth. It is the fool who turns his back on God; it is the fool who ignores the message found in the short sermons at the beginning and at the end of each *Vie des Pères* tale; it is the fool who plays the game of life by his or her own rules. This message marks the

¹⁸ Albert Lecoy de la Marche and Jacques Berlioz, *Le Rire du prédicateur: récits facétieux du Moyen Âge*, Miroir du Moyen Âge (Turnhout: Brepols, 1992; orig. 1889); Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Prêcher d'exemples: récits de prédicateurs du Moyen Âge* (Paris: Stock, 1985); Jacques Berlioz, 'L'Auditoire des prédicateurs dans la littérature des "exempla" (XIII^e–XIV^e siècles)', *Medioevo e Rinascimento*, 3 (1989), 125–58.

¹⁹ Jeannine Horowitz and Sophia Menache, *L'Humour en chaire: le rire dans l'église médiévale*, Histoire et Société, 28 (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1994), p. 60.

²⁰ Indeed, the first *Vie des Pères* as a whole provides evidence that in the combination of authorial wile and deftness, and realistic, not to say pragmatic manuscript makers, the Middle Ages could be playful on any number of levels whilst remaining focused on the deadly serious game of salvation.

very beginning of the short sermon which introduces *Queue*, contrasting sharply with the wisdom of the proverbial couplet which opens a tale: 'cil qui le louf vult ressembler | la piau del louf doit afubler' (vv. 7630–31). The notion of folly is a constant throughout the thirty or so lines of the introduction, an introduction which ends with the message that the wise will side with God. There is a power play in the minds of all human beings, and it is evident to our author (and to all Christians) how the struggle must end. The conceptual message of the prologue to this tale illustrates how from the outset language and meanings associated with play, gamesmanship, folly, and flippancy are present. Although the narrative will pick up apace, there is still time to remind the audience of the folly of Adam. He played the game badly, and so we all lost out. There is then a significant detail for the modern reader, one of the rare mentions of the author's source material: 'les livres anciens' (v. 7664). The temporal setting is quickly determined, perhaps influenced by the mention of the *anciens*: we are now 'au tens saint Jerome' (v. 7668), a fitting time for a tale contained in a collection entitled the *Vie des Pères* (or variants thereof, occasionally mentioning also Miracles of the Virgin). This is an important and relatively rare instance of an identifiable character being named, and at first sight absolutely central, in what is otherwise a perhaps intentionally anonymous work.

The topographical location of the narrative is also given at this point: the events occur 'en Bethleem' (v. 7669). It is generally accepted that St Jerome headed a monastery in Bethlehem from 386 until his death. Someone — quite possibly our author — has adapted the *exemplum* of the train and inserted accurate details of St Jerome's life. The details which are given in the opening lines of *Queue* do correspond to certain historical details associated with this saint: for example, the audience is told that he 'demora mout longuement | en bone vie et saintement' (vv. 7670–71). Hagiographical legend and historical explorations lead us to believe that he did indeed head his monastery for over thirty years. Then we are informed that he went to pray every day in the holy city and 'ot le monde en vilté' (v. 7672). This is not just another formulaic line describing an anonymous hermit but, for once, an apparently accurate portrait of a historical (if often romanticized) figure.²¹

²¹ Biographical details and iconographical notes taken from John J. Delaney, *Dictionary of Saints* (New York: Doubleday, 1980); Daniel Russo, *Saint Jérôme en Italie: étude d'iconographie et de spiritualité XIII^e–XV^e siècles* (Paris: Découverte; Rome: École Française, 1987); Bernhard Ridderbos, *Saints and Symbols: Images of Saint Jerome in Early Italian Art* (Groningen: Bouma's Boekhuis, 1984); and Herbert Friedmann, *A Bestiary for St Jerome: Animal Symbolism in European Religious Art* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute, 1980). Illustrated *Vie des Pères* manuscripts blatantly oppose the colour and vivacity of the world and the drabness of the life of a hermit.

During the narrative the author reiterates the perfection of St Jerome and his companion, but as the *exemplum* story sets in this becomes a St Jerome of fiction as opposed to the near-historical figure presented earlier in the tale. The two men walk reciting Psalms, a stock image of the good and saintly, but one that takes on a more tailored nature here — not to say a playful touch — given that St Jerome was famous for having translated the Psalms himself. The two men spot the lavishly dressed townswoman who, although living in fourth-century Bethlehem, is wearing a long *bliant* and a lacy, yellow wimple: if ever there was an example of thirteenth-century *nouveau riche* bling, this is it. Rather incongruously, these two men (who would wear dowdy garments in manuscript illustrations and would inspire just that image of drabness in the minds of the audience) are amongst the few characters in the entire collection to laugh, an interesting point when one notes their extreme sanctity.²² The way the entire episode is dealt with by our author suggests his own 'humanistic nature', confirmed by episodes from other tales: the standard *contemptus mundi* of much moralizing material is present but watered down somewhat in the *Vie des Pères*. In *Queue* the two saintly men's humanity is expressed through their laughter and by their words to the woman, words which both are kind and carry a fundamental message which could change her hopes of salvation given that they clearly spell out the rules of the game of life. The holy men insist that they are not laughing at her. This is a decided shift from the more accusatory and minatory sermons, and from Jerome's own reputation as an ardent anti-feminist. Indeed, the saint himself says: 'nos rions de vostre bien' (v. 7750).²³ Even before the men explain themselves the woman is shamed by their laughter. However, she is addressed in a courtly tone as befits thirteenth-century men speaking to a lady. It might even be posited that the number of direct addresses and references to women throughout the tale may well point to the author having in mind the women in his initial audience. Of course, these may also be a simple reflection of medieval antifeminism/misogyny, or an awareness that the narrative tells of a

²² In *St Paulin* (v. 14465) the Saracen king laughs at Paulin's prophecy and refuses to convert. In the same tale, the mother previously thinks Paulin is making fun of her and needs him to reassure her of his seriousness. One notes changing attitudes towards laughter in the thirteenth century: '[Jacques de Vitry ...] revendique la gaieté comme le privilège du vrai chrétien, comme une vertu à l'opposé de la tristesse, qui est un défaut et un meuble inutile' (Horowitz and Menache, *L'Humour en chair*, p. 69).

²³ This is quite different from devil's laughter in *Piège au diable*, a tale belonging to the first continuation where, at the moment of a holy hermit's unjust execution, the hideous laughter of the scheming devil rings out.

chic and conceited woman and that women were prone to such displays of pride in their clothing and fashion. However, the text as a whole is not particularly antifeminist, and virtuous, pious, or repentant women are the heroines of, or important to, many tales. I suspect that in *Queue* the author is not simply talking about women but is also talking to women: what might they have made of the introduction, narrative, and epilogue?

The laughter of St Jerome and his companion is a gentle and unthreatening motif until the saint's account of the puddle episode to the lady. Here we witness the introduction of a sinister parallel to their laughter: the devil 'de vos mesprisons ce rist' (v. 7797). The woman tearfully confesses on the spot. As she discards her sumptuous clothes, the once playful and seemingly victorious devils are miraculously — magically even — fixed to the spot by St Jerome so that the inhabitants of Bethlehem can witness the wonder for themselves. The unanticipated outward sign of mirth displayed by St Jerome and his companion is given surprising emphasis in the text: the passage where the author explains that the two holy men could not stop themselves from laughing (v. 7732) to where the woman believes their explanations and vows to change her ways (v. 7819) occupies around half the narrative space. They explain that their laughter is directed at the unfortunate devil riding on the train, not her ostentatious show of pride. It is a very clear explanation of how their laughter works in her favour: as Bergson might have pointed out, her behaviour challenges the category of society to which she would hope to belong, one associated with spiritual rather than worldly values. She obviously considers herself to be part of the 'in crowd', but association with this particular category of society will lead to damnation not salvation. The laughter displayed by the two holy men does not necessarily suggest a comedy value, more a distance between them and the subject of their laughter, the woman who would in no way have considered herself 'excluded' before her fortunate encounter with the hermit. This is not carnivalesque play, nor is it comedic: there is an appealing innocence to the proceedings which enables the audience to consider its own place. The tale appeals to the familiar; not necessarily to a familiar story but to a familiar experience shared by the bourgeois audience. The concept of the social function of laughter in *Queue* is all the more compelling when we bear in mind the manifestly interdependent relationship in the Middle Ages between Church and state, sacred and profane, belonging and exclusion, order and disorder. As St Jerome points out to the woman, nothing good can come from folly (v. 7819). By this point the laughter has long dissipated, but both author and characters continue to exploit the motif of foolishness. The juxtaposition of the explanation that folly will lead to no good and the woman's confession (which is the ultimate aim of the narrative and the

author's collective text) is quite startling. On one line we are reminded that the woman had perhaps been trying to challenge something which cannot be challenged; on the next line she confesses and, for the moment at least, saves her soul. These few lines might conceivably have some play value since they mirror the woman's predicament at the beginning of the narrative, and it is here that the devil disappears from the train and from the story. The devil played and lost, which might at least lead to a smile of relief and satisfaction. As far as the author and St Jerome are concerned, however, there is no more laughter. The playfulness of *Queue* dissipates as the deadly serious message asserts itself. In the epilogue, women who dress extravagantly are strongly criticized. These women shame their husbands and cause them to sin just in order to pay for such vanities. The author makes an important address to his audience at the end of the epilogue: it is the *sens* that is important — the moral of the story — not the entertaining narrative. After an opening dozen lines illustrating religious foolishness, the prologue had stressed that all good things come from God and ended on an upbeat note; the epilogue now warns against *amour propre* but without ever threatening hell and damnation. *Queue* contains much to please a contemporary audience. It has the authority of *les livres anciens* and recounts the story of a familiar saint. It is set in an exotic yet recognizable place and is briefly punctuated by lively dialogue. Women of the type described here must have been familiar figures in any thirteenth-century town and court, if not actually present in the audience. In general terms, the 'ordinary' nature of *Queue* would have made it more accessible, more of an already lived experience. Above all, it is an indulgent pious story. Such plot as there is relies on a pleasing, not too threatening supernatural twist which not only adds interest but without any doubt contributes also a sense of play. The disturbing image of devils playing on the train of the woman, and by extension claiming her soul, is kept very much at arm's length by the intervention of the holy men and the skill of the author. The audience is mischievously shown an image of itself and it is even invited to laugh at itself, presumably with nervousness and relief: thanks to St Jerome the heroine (and therefore the audience) need not undergo superhuman trials of faith in order to be saved. If this message is understood, then the tale has succeeded in every sense.

Queue is of interest for many reasons, not least the comparatively lengthy epilogue and relatively long in-tale monologues. It is in no way comedic, although the pivotal point of the narrative is an (unexpected) instance of laughter inspired by a brief comic instance. There are a variety of indications regarding the playfulness of the author of this otherwise sober text: acid criticism is directed towards women who dress extravagantly (this in a section valuable to historians for its

vestimentary detail). The richness of this particular passage suggests a certain *plaisir du texte*, evidenced in many other places across the twenty thousand lines of the *Vie des Pères*. My comments do not contradict strongly held beliefs by Michel Zink, Claudio Galderisi, and others that the *Vie des Pères* is a fundamentally serious and pious work. Indeed, they reinforce the same commentators' belief that the author was a sincerely pious literary genius. There is also much to be learned from the paratextual features reflecting generations of reception, as evidenced by the work of Keith Busby.²⁴ There are any number of bitter criticisms, biting asides, ironic touches, and incongruous details which suggest that our devout author both had a sense of playfulness and understood that his reader might appreciate the odd light touch in such a solemn theoretical context. Almost forty lines of the epilogue to *Queue* are cheeky, pointed, and sharp. It is only the final six lines which remind the reader that the story is not as important as its message, but there is no imbalance. Despite the inevitable difficulties of interpreting medieval material, constantly highlighted by Elaine Block, I would argue that this particular short narrative is a jewel, whose author functions in pretty much the same way as might the creator of an iconographical matrix.²⁵ By means of restrained *amplificatio* the author takes commonly available material and reworks it into a gripping story where, on the one hand, nothing much happens, and on the other a multilayered sense of playfulness keeps the reader captivated as it delivers its stark message.

²⁴ Zink, *Poésie et conversion au Moyen Âge*; Galderisi, *Diegesis*; Busby, *Codex and Context*.

²⁵ See for example Elaine C. Block, 'Obscuring Iconography: Mysterious Misericords', *Profane Arts of the Middle Ages / Les Arts profanes du moyen âge*, 8 (1999), 255–73.

FAIRY TALE OR HAIRY TAIL? THE CURIOUS CREATURES ON MEDIEVAL MISERICORDS

S. J. F. S. Phillips

There are over a hundred different creatures that can be identified on British medieval misericords. This chapter will introduce the diversity of animal species that can be found, highlight the types of creatures that are represented, and clarify when they appear over time and space. In so doing, the discussion will explore the reasons why animals may have been chosen as a ‘playful’ means of representation / signification in such a secret and sacred context.

Introduction

The choir stalls of churches, cathedrals, and chapels often contain misericords, a type of hinged ‘tip-up’ seat offering a means of rest/support to the occupant. These seats were installed from as early as the twelfth century, and many reveal carvings depicting humans, flora, and fauna underneath them. The animals found carved on misericords represent a variety of species, date to a number of chronological periods, and are found in various geographical locations. The types of animal motifs that are represented range from single figures to groups of creatures or a set of scenes related to a theme or story. Obviously, the more complex the theme, the

With the greatest appreciation to Oz Hardwick for his enduring patience and dedication in putting this volume together, and with respect to my inspirational friend across the North Sea, Prof. Thomas Pettit, for introducing me to the literature, narrative, and research on folk and fairy tales. Finally, but most importantly, I write this chapter in honour of Elaine: thank you for taking me under your wing.

greater the amount of carving space required. Restrictions on carving space underneath a seat may have influenced the manner in which an animal was presented in terms of proportional size, dimensions, direction, poise, and stance. This may in turn account for the seeming distortion of a realistic animal subject, towards a less naturalistic, more stylized or playful animal depiction.

Recent research by the current author has focused on quantifying the whole range of animals represented on misericords in the United Kingdom.¹ This revealed around 1550 misericords that contained animals either as the primary subject matter of the central console and/or as the theme of subordinate flanking carvings (supporters).² The range of species was found to include a wide variety of realistic-looking creatures (hairy tail creatures) common on the land, in the air, and in the sea, and other less realistic creatures (fairy tale creatures) of the mind, specifically composite, fantastic, or mythological creatures. Within this misericord sample, over a hundred different creatures were identified, and a limited selection of these is illustrated in Figures 65 to 71. This research complements existing publications focused on creatures depicted on misericords, often at a particular location or as part of a wider thematic study.³

¹ S. J. F. S. Phillips, 'Animal Visual Culture in the Middle Ages' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Durham, 2008).

² This supports statements by Laird, who suggests that animal subjects represent about a quarter of all misericords and include 'mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish and a few invertebrates', with flora representing the most popular theme, followed by fauna, humans, heraldry, and finally humanoid monsters: Marshall Laird, *English Misericords* (London: John Murray, 1986), p. 10.

³ See, for example, Elaine C. Block, 'Bell the Cat and Gnaw the Bone', *Reinardus*, 4 (1991), 41–50, for cats; Kenneth Varty, *Reynard, Renart, Reinart and Other Foxes in Medieval England: The Iconographic Evidence* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999), for foxes; M. Miyazaki, 'Misericord Owls and Anti-Semitism', in *The Mark of the Beast*, ed. by M. Miyazaki (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 23–49, for owls; Paul Hardwick, 'Foxing Daun Russell: Moral Lessons of Poultry on Misericords and in Literature', *Reinardus*, 17 (2004), 85–94, for poultry. For other wild, domestic, or exotic animals, see Sarah Wells, 'Seeing is Believing: Animal Material Culture in Medieval England', in *Breaking and Shaping Beastly Bodies: Animals as Material Culture in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Aleksander Pluskowski (Oxford: Oxbow, 2007), pp. 65–79, and S. J. F. S. Phillips, 'Carved for Consumption: Birds in English Medieval Misericordia', in *Documenta Archaeobiologiae: Yearbook of the State Collection of Anthropology and Palaeoanatomy*, ed. by G. Grupe and J. Peters (Munich: Verlag Marie Leidorf, Rahden/Westf, 2005); Phillips, 'A Database of Animals in Medieval Misericordia', in *Animal Worlds* (Austria: [n.pub.], 2005); Phillips, 'The Pig in Medieval Iconography', in *Pigs and Humans: 10,000 Years of Interaction*, ed. by Umberto Albarella, Keith Dobney, and Peter Rowley-Conwy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 373–88; Phillips, 'Flying Low Down Under: Representations of Winged Mammals,



Figure 65. Medieval misericord, Durham Cathedral. Photo by S. J. F. S. Phillips.

Creature Types

The most common types of realistic creatures represented on misericords are land creatures, accounting for 45 per cent of all animal misericords. The most frequently represented individual land creature nationally is the lion. The misericord carvers presented images of real lions and heraldic lions, as well as lion-masks, which together account for at least a quarter of all named land creatures represented in the sample researched.⁴ Domestic and wild canines were also highly popular subjects to be represented, accounting for about a fifth of the land-creature sample. These depictions include both domestic dogs and hounds, as well as wild foxes, in both naturalistic and anthropomorphized representations. Carvings of primates were

Fowl and Birds on Medieval English Misericords', in *Profane Imagery in Marginal Arts of the Middle Ages*, ed. by Elaine C. Block and M. Jones, *Profane Arts of the Middle Ages*, 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), pp. 83–104; and Phillips, 'Animal Visual Culture in the Middle Ages'.

⁴ The sample was based on data provided by G. L. Remnant, *A Catalogue of Misericords in Great Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), and supplemented by other published reports.

the next most numerous, including both apes and monkeys, and again both naturalistic and anthropomorphic images occur. Other creatures that were catalogued in smaller numbers included the calf, dromedary, cow, deer, doe, donkey, fawn, greyhound, hedgehog, hippopotamus, hog, hyena, kid, kitten, lioness, piglet, porcupine, reptile, rhinoceros, salamander, serpent, slug, tigress, and weasel, as well as representations of related animal images such as heraldic leopard-masks, the hobby-horse, and the horseshoe.

The second largest type of creature depicted on misericords was that of the mind creature (representing about a third or 32 per cent of all misericord animals). The most popular creature in this group was the dragon, followed by the wyvern, the griffin, merpeople (mermaid/merman), the wodehouse (wild man/wild woman), and the unicorn. However, a fifth of all creatures of this type are unidentified in Remnant's *Catalogue of Misericords in Great Britain* beyond a generic description such as 'a beast', 'composite beast', 'grotesque', 'animal headed', or 'winged monster'. A number of composite creatures are recorded that share both human and animal features such as the head, eyes, ears, or tusks of one animal contrasted with the upper or lower body, legs, feet, and skin of another (e.g. the centaur). The representation of such strange creatures in one visual medium may have influenced their appearance in others and vice versa. It is possible that some depictions were representations of realistic creatures, which became distorted using secondhand and possibly inaccurate oral or written descriptions, or perhaps represented the more playful expressions of the carvers' — or their patrons' — creativity.

The third largest group of creatures depicted on misericords were the air creatures, which represented about a fifth (21 per cent) of the total sample. The most popular birds to be represented were the eagle and double-headed eagle. The goose, pelican, and owl were also very popular birds, followed by a range of other birds and fowl in smaller numbers such as the hawk and cock, swan, bat, crane, and dove, as well as the blackbird, demi-eagle, hawkfinch, hoopoe, osprey, partridge, pigeon, plover, raven, snipe, sparrow, spoonbill, teal, and woodpigeon. This corpus of species may be expanded further by including depictions of identifiable species parts such as ostrich feathers.⁵ However, more than a tenth of all air creatures are unidentified beyond a generic description such as a 'bird' or an 'unidentified bird'.

⁵ Although a winged mammal, the bat was regarded as a bird in the medieval period, although, as noted in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 764, it was recognized as possessing peculiarities of physiology 'not found in other birds': *Bestiary*, ed. and trans. by Richard Barber (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1993), p. 157.

The least well-represented creature type was that of the sea creature, accounting for a tiny fraction (approximately 2 per cent) of all misericords. A third of sea creatures represented were described as dolphins, followed by edible marine or freshwater species such as the eel and the whelk, and supplemented by others in smaller proportions such as the crab, scallop, conch, salmon, and otter.⁶ However, about a third of all sea creatures are unidentified by Remnant beyond a generic description (e.g. 'fish' or 'unidentified fish').

It is possible that some species were identifiable at one time, perhaps if they were painted as was the case with other woodwork. If this had been the case, the decoration and colouration of misericords would have been particularly important in identifying particular animal species that have similar diagnostic features (such as birds or fish). Jones and Tracy have discussed the traces of pigment on a stall end at Haddon Hall which indicate that it was possible that misericords could have been painted,⁷ and Baxandall's work on wood sculpture emphasizes the different effects that colour could have on woodwork in enhancing the carving.⁸ If animal misericords were indeed painted, the craftsmen responsible would have had the pleasure of selecting a palette and bringing the carvings alive with the use of vibrant colour, in which case the decorative function of the misericords would have been considerably enhanced. Unfortunately, there is little remaining evidence that paint was applied to extant misericords.⁹ There is no published literature available on research into pigment identification on misericords, and currently no use of special photographic exposure techniques nor any wood samples being taken from misericords for further analysis. This reflects the limitations of current research on the carvings, yet limits the destruction this type of research might cause to the misericord if it were investigated.

⁶ The otter was included in this group due to its habitation in a largely marine environment.

⁷ Malcolm Jones and Charles Tracy, 'A Medieval Choirstall Desk End at Haddon Hall: The Fox-Bishop and the Geese-Hangmen', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 144 (1991), 107–15.

⁸ M. Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany, 1475–1525* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).

⁹ One of the few striking examples of painted detail on misericords is to be found in St Mary's, Beverley, where musical notation appears on a manuscript used by a pair of singing clerical foxes. This is discussed in Frédéric Billiet, 'Postface: Le *Magnificat* dans les stalles de Beverley', in *Grant Risee? The Medieval Comic Presence / La Présence comique médiévale: Essays in Memory of Brian J. Levy*, ed. by Adrian P. Tudor and Alan Hindley, *Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe*, 11 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), pp. 346–56.



Figure 66. Horse, Durham Cathedral. Photo by S. J. F. S. Phillips.



Figure 67. Dog, Durham Cathedral. Photo by S. J. F. S. Phillips.



Figure 68. Crab, Durham Cathedral. Photo by S. J. F. S. Phillips.



Figure 69. Unicorn Scene, Durham Castle. Photo by S. J. F. S. Phillips.



Figure 70. Pigs, Durham Castle. Photo by S. J. F. S. Phillips.



Figure 71. Eagle, Durham Castle. Photo by S. J. F. S. Phillips.

Creature Location

The location of creature representations can provide clues as to why the images were made, how they were viewed, and how they functioned. Churches and cathedrals were very prominent social and religious centres during the medieval period, and particularly those locales with more than one church or cathedral are areas likely to reveal larger numbers of surviving misericord representations of all types. This is because if a greater investment was afforded in the furnishing and decoration of religious centres in those locations, and even accounting for poor survival of certain types of materials, those areas are still likely to present greater scope for revealing animal misericords than those that experienced less cultural investment. However, for any number of diverse reasons, some churches, cathedrals, and chapels simply do not have surviving misericords. Consequently, the degree to which an investigation of location of animal misericord representation may be conducted, and may offer meaningful results, is limited insofar as much of the material reflects only those locations where misericords have survived and have been catalogued. Research of the published misericords highlights that the vast majority catalogued in Britain are found in England (over 95 per cent). Only small numbers of misericords are catalogued in Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. The geographical data, therefore, may be characterized by a basic bias, in that the current location of misericords with creatures is likely a reflection of those locations where misericords survive. A number of counties will also collectively represent more misericords than others simply because a larger number of churches and cathedrals have been recorded.

The numerical popularity of particular creature types can to some extent be linked to the location of major medieval centres — for example, York and Lincoln — but this is not so in every case as the destruction of medieval misericords demonstrates in other locations, such as Durham. The counties of Yorkshire, Berkshire, and Lincolnshire revealed larger numbers of misericords depicting land, air, and mind creatures than many other counties (but not with regard to sea creatures where fewer representations existed to display any patterns). The data from Yorkshire (e.g. St Mary, Old Malton; St John, Halifax; St Mary the Virgin, Sprotborough; Beverley Minster, Ripon Minster, and York Minster) included the widest variety of churches and cathedrals, followed by Lincolnshire (e.g. Lincoln Minster, St Botolph's Church, Boston and Holy Trinity College Chapel, Tattershall), and Berkshire (e.g. St George's Chapel, Windsor and St Peter and St Paul, Wantage). Unfortunately, it may not be possible to identify an exclusive geographical pattern unique to creature type, in view of the limitations highlighted.

However, in order to do this most objectively a geographical analysis would have to be made of all surviving misericords throughout the country (including all non-creature subjects).¹⁰

Creature Chronology

The chronological period of creature carvings that were dated revealed quite a broad time span ranging from the twelfth century to the sixteenth century, though the author's research reveals a date range exceeding the chronological parameters of the medieval period.¹¹ Of those that were dated, there were no creatures represented prior to the thirteenth century, whilst the most popular period for representation for all creature types (land, air, sea, mind) was the fifteenth century, with proportions generally rising from the fourteenth century to the fifteenth century, and falling off more notably from the fifteenth century to the sixteenth century. However, misericords are very difficult things to which to attribute an absolute date of creation and/or finish. Any data dealing with misericord chronology should be regarded flexibly, as the methods used to date misericords are not scientific (by archaeological standards), but use more relative, subjective, and tentative criteria.¹²

Many of the misericords are only datable because they remain in context, and dating relies mainly on stylistic factors displaying period characteristics such as variations in the shape of the choir stall and misericord seat ledges; detail of the way foliage, armour, or clothing is depicted; observation of a carved date on the misericord or of a carved name of an identifiable donor/patron on a misericord; identification of a carved crest, coat of arms, or heraldic cognizance; and use of supporting contemporary documents such as manuscripts, church archives, building accounts relating to commissioning of woodwork, or wills. A proportion of the misericords researched, therefore, were not dated, because they were out of their original context and were of unknown origin, having been detached from their ecclesiastical context, recovered, and archived.

¹⁰ This is beyond the scope of this chapter.

¹¹ The research data includes misericords from Durham Cathedral dating to the seventeenth century.

¹² Typically those derived from Remnant, *Catalogue of Misericords*, pp. xix–xxii, though on this point refer also to Christa Grössinger, 'Misericords', in *Age of Chivalry: Art in Plantagenet England 1200–1400*, ed. by James Alexander and Paul Binski (London: Royal Academy of Arts; Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987), pp. 122–24.

Unfortunately, although attempts at general dates have been made using stylistic criteria, this does not account for use of historical stylization of earlier carvings by later carvers, attempts at copies of other media from earlier patterns, illuminations, and pictures in older manuscripts and books,¹³ use of ornamental conventions from other media such as stone carving, or the fact that there are differing levels of skill and expertise between craftsmen. Variations in the work — and work rates — of different carvers of the same period have been observed at Worcester and Lincoln Cathedrals.¹⁴ These factors can make the misericords produced seem to date from different periods, even if they were produced at the same time. Unfortunately, this makes being able to identify distinct changes and developments in misericord animal themes through time and space extremely difficult.

Playful Creatures

In a world where the production, execution, and display of many images were controlled, it is possible that misericords offered the carver a greater scope for representation than was afforded in other locations, and that the choir stalls offered a more liberal gallery space for the display of more secret, shocking, and even offensive images. However, in order not to offend the patron of the misericords, the occupant of the stall, or the viewer of the carving, animals were frequently selected instead of humans as a means of making the bawdy, satirical, or simply playful themes represented more palatable and acceptable. The use of animals enabled the real identities of any human characters drawn upon to be edited, whilst still allowing every aspect of life to be embraced and depicted. Animals were, therefore, the ultimate stars of their day and were used to startle, stun, and play upon people's minds, thoughts, and behaviours. Some creatures and animal themes predominate over others, and the reasons for this are varied, extensive, and complex, since they are often unique to the attributes of the individual creatures depicted, their patrons' preferences, and the context in which the creatures were displayed. However, it is difficult to establish the extent to which craftspeople, artists, or an audience controlled the themes or images represented upon misericords. It seems that many people chose to represent animal themes, and depending upon the role and function of those who commissioned the misericord, this may indicate what function

¹³ Mary D. Cox, 'Twelfth-Century Design Sources of Worcester Cathedral Misericords', *Archaeologia*, 47 (1959), 165–78.

¹⁴ Remnant, *Catalogue of Misericords*, p. xxii.

the creation of the carving and the subsequent viewing of that animal misericord was expected to serve; that is, what message they hoped to transmit.

The nature, function, and context of use of animals in misericords may have altered over time, reflecting cultural shifts and transformations. Some of the themes depicted may, therefore, be incomprehensible to modern eyes. Burke stresses the importance of being familiar with the cultural codes of a society in order to understand or interpret the messages attached to an image, noting that 'an Australian bushman would be unable to recognize the subject of a Last Supper; to him it would only convey the idea of an excited dinner party'.¹⁵ This emphasizes the difficulty in knowing why an animal was chosen for a particular misericord, at any given location or period in time. It may be the case that, for some, animals were intended to reflect expressions of anticlericalism, atheism, profanity, and subversion (e.g. by clerics) in response to rising tensions regarding their social, religious, and moral duties and status. Misericords with specific motifs also may have been installed in an attempt to demonstrate the wicked thoughts and deeds that the congregation (or clergy) had considered and/or committed, and so by carving animals representing particular activities and behaviours, humans could literally put their past deeds behind them and symbolically suppress their deviant urges down beneath them.

Ecclesiastical research indicates that particular members of the community may at times have occupied certain stalls,¹⁶ a consideration which may account for why an animal can be found located in a particular choir stall. It is difficult to know whether anyone other than the patrons or the clergy were aware of the carvings in the choir stalls unless they had a vested interest in a representation being commissioned and/or installed. Even at the times when misericords were raised up, they might not have been so easy to view. This would depend upon their style, position, and the conditions of natural or candle light in the choir. Indeed, when the stalls were being occupied, such as during a service, the occupant of that stall would be standing in front of the misericord and so would obstruct any view of it, whether it was raised up or down. Consequently, if it were being utilized as a seat, the carvings definitely would not have been seen. Nevertheless, animals were used in misericord decoration because they were highly adaptable as subject matter. And

¹⁵ Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Use of Images as Historical Evidence* (London: Reaktion, 2001), p. 36.

¹⁶ W. J. Hardy, 'Remarks on the History of Seat Reservation in Churches', *Archaeologia*, 53 (1892), 95–106; Margaret Aston, 'Segregation in Church', in *Women in the Church*, ed. by W. J. Shiels and D. Wood, *Studies in Church History*, 27 (London: Basil Blackwell, 1991), pp. 237–94.

it is clear that various creatures were chosen for a wide range of purposes at particular times and at specific locations.¹⁷

It is possible that the positioning of animal themes within church architecture and furniture may have been influenced by perceptions of the accepted order of the Church and God's view of it, and by those who regularly used and sat in particular seats, and who may have contributed to their upkeep.¹⁸ Aston, in examining the long-held customary and hierarchical separation of the different types of worshippers in church ritual,¹⁹ addresses not only the clerics, but also issues regarding the vocation, age, and sex of the laity, and notes that 'at the rite of Communion deaconesses would come first, followed by virgins and widows. These graduations affected worshippers' places in church, and where they stood or sat'.²⁰ Aston cites St Cyril, bishop of Jerusalem, in his *Catecheses*, who 'compared the congregation behind the closed doors of the church to the inhabitants of the Ark, in which despite the total seclusion of Noah and his wives, decency prevailed'.²¹ Physical separation of the sexes was thought necessary to minimize the risks of sexual attraction and maintain the purity of worship. Aston states that medieval women were placed 'furthest from the altar, chancel, and holiest part of the building,' usually sitting on the north (left) side of the church (assuming the church typically faces east), whilst men could be found positioned on the south (right) side, although in later periods it became common for a family to sit together. Proximity to the south door generally meant that you were closer to the 'perils of the world outside'. Aston further cites the Annals of St Bertin, which tell of 'the terrors that might invade the Ark of the church' and where at one church, during a Mass, 'a wolf suddenly came in and disturbed all the men-folk present [...] then after doing the same thing among the women-folk, it disappeared'.²² It is possible that similar concepts of segregation were exerted within the display of animal themes spatially positioned around the church, not only in terms of direction but with level of display (both above and below eye level) and ease of vision (within a window or upon a carving concealed underneath a seat). Those who came to use the church,

¹⁷ Miyazaki, 'Misericord Owls and Medieval Anti-Semitism'.

¹⁸ Aston, 'Segregation in Church', p. 248.

¹⁹ The arrangement of people at worship is considered in the *Didascalia Apostolorum* dating to the third century.

²⁰ Aston, 'Segregation in Church', p. 239.

²¹ Aston, 'Segregation in Church', p. 240.

²² Aston, 'Segregation in Church', p. 242.

like those who were members of a guild, acquired a certain identity from participating in their shared activities. These persons may have had strong associations with particular animals and so had them carved on misericords. For example, a large number of animals were depicted in stylized forms as part of heraldic motifs in crests and coats of arms to represent personal and group identity, including the cat, dog, lion, leopard, eagle, martlet, parrot, swan, hart, unicorn, and griffin.

Animals were represented in various scenes that would have been experienced from daily life or observation. Beasts such as the horse, ass, donkey, mule, camel, and elephant were frequently depicted serving their natural functions as modes of transport and beasts of burden in peacetime, display, or war. There are also depictions of animals in sporting and gaming activities including baiting, hawking, and hunting. Calendrical depictions feature animals to serve as indications of seasonal activities, such as bird scaring, pig fattening, pig killing, sheep shearing, shoeing the horse, and milking. Animals also appear in a wide range of depictions representing human occupations, crafts, and trades, such as a cook, a farrier, and a shepherd. Animals were associated with having human-like qualities and so may have been a medium used to express other aspects of social and professional life in order that humans could communicate concepts, conduct, and emotions, or to emphasize the contrasts of good and evil, positive and negative, light and dark, life and death. This indicates that certain creatures may have been used as a way of re-enforcing and exploring ideas about identity, gender, sexuality, and passion, as well as play.

In her studies of gender, Gilchrist notes that religious women were likely to develop their own vocabulary of images in order to put themselves into context.²³ She indicates that a focus on 'the femininity of Christ, and on his suffering, such as use of the Agnus Dei (the lamb, or sacrifice, of Christ)' was a common trait found in female piety.²⁴ Other contributions by Wylie, Gilchrist and Olivia, and Gilchrist can help us to appreciate the use of animals in specific contexts.²⁵

²³ Roberta Gilchrist, 'Virgin Territory: Gender and Material Culture. The Archaeology of Religious Women', *Cambridge Archaeological Journal*, 6 (1996), 119–36.

²⁴ Gilchrist, 'Virgin Territory', p. 131.

²⁵ A. Wylie, 'Gender Theory and the Archaeological Record: Why Is There No Archaeology of Gender?', in *Engendering Archaeology: Women and Prehistory*, ed. by J. M. Gero and M. W. Conkey (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), pp. 31–54; Roberta Gilchrist and M. Olivia, *Religious Women in Medieval East Anglia*, Studies in East Anglian History, 1 (Norwich: Centre of East Anglian Studies, 1993); and Roberta Gilchrist, 'Medieval Bodies in the Material World: Gender, Stigma and the Body', in *Framing Medieval Bodies*, ed. by S. Kay and Miri Rubin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 43–62; *Gender and Material Culture: The Archaeology of Religious Women* (London: Routledge, 1994).

It is furthermore possible that animal representations were used in conjunction with other religious resources and formalized social practices such as physical routes of procession, and hierarchical positioning (i.e. standing order and direction) and expression of extreme gestures for time-dependant liturgical observances.²⁶ The medieval ecclesiastical audience would have been captivated by the religious actors marketing the ideas and moral conundrums of the day. In this respect, an individual entering the church would be socialized within an animal visual culture enabling the church and its patrons, who supported the widespread rebuilding of parish churches, to maintain their positions over their parishioners. This meant that the provision of animal imagery and animal misericords in ecclesiastical contexts was generated by a more complex construction than some explanations suggest, such as animals being used as a means to educate the illiterate and immoral majority by a more literate — although possibly no more moral — clergy.

Animals were widely depicted because they could be used as subtle iconographical and symbolic tools. Gathercole suggests that ‘the medieval “animaliers”, or [...] animal artists, used their animal figures for symbolic, narrative, or purely decorative purposes’.²⁷ Animals including the lamb, camel, boar, fox, rabbit, and swan were frequently chosen because they could be used as visual characters to communicate human realities in conjunction with the representation of allegories and religious stories, saints, angels and devils, morality, proverbs, popular sayings, romances, and folk tales. Other literature on fairy tales, and on myths and legends, may also assist the medieval scholar in reaching an understanding of the various reasons why animals were inspirational in making their way into the misericord record.²⁸ People had a belief or faith in the existence of certain creatures that they never saw, and that we now know were imaginary, such as the unicorn.²⁹ This, perhaps, is more easily appreciated in a world where seeing was not required for believing. In the Middle Ages people generally had faith, and were required to have faith, since the opportunity for personal experience, knowledge, and growth was restricted and limited.

However, the identification and representation of some creature types, such as the mind creatures, are often very difficult to define, due to the diversity of hybrid

²⁶ C. P. Graves, ‘Social Space in the English Medieval Parish Church’, *Economy and Society*, 18 (1989), 308–09.

²⁷ P. M. Gathercole, *Animals in Medieval French Manuscript Illumination* (Dyfed: Edwin Mellen, 1995), p. 105.

²⁸ See the Appendix for bibliographies of folk tales, fairy tales, and myths and legends.

²⁹ Wells, ‘Seeing is Believing’.

or composite forms that can be found. This may have led some cataloguers to identify particular creatures as one species rather than another, which may in turn have caused certain species to predominate over others in the data patterns revealed, as in the case of creatures catalogued as the amphisbaena, basilisk, and cockatrice. Indeed, some cataloguers may regard particular composites as synonymous when they are not necessarily regarded so by others, such as the basilisk and the cockatrice.³⁰ Current research by the author has also revealed many doubts over the accuracy of catalogued identifications made by previous scholars, who perhaps were operating with a more subjective set of criteria for the identification and recording of creatures than would today's archaeologist. It seems that if one were to draw upon historical sources, a number of images of animals would be accepted and interpreted as particular creatures simply because they were expected to be seen in the specific contexts being researched — such as the pelican or the eagle in a church or cathedral on account of their associations with Christ and Christianity³¹ — but this does not account for all creatures depicted or the manner in which they are depicted.³²

Nevertheless, in view of the wide range of reasons why animals were chosen, it can be appreciated that some degree of manipulation was in progress by the producers and consumers of animal misericords, and thus the final extent of the circulation of the animal image or motif. What survives to the modern period demonstrates that animals had an important visual function in the medieval world.

Conclusion

In the medieval period creatures were a favoured theme to which all social classes could relate. A human's personal exposure to, and experience of, particular creatures may be influenced by their position in their own social class. Indeed, creatures themselves can be attributed with a social rank in the same way as humans, and use of these creatures as a visual motif on specific materials — especially prestigious

³⁰ Refer to A. H. Collins, *Symbolism of Animals and Birds Represented in English Church Architecture* (London: Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons, 1913), p. 145; Peter Lum, *Fabulous Beasts* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1952), p. 38; Juan Eduardo Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), p. 23.

³¹ Phillips, 'Carved for Consumption', and Phillips, 'Flying Low Down Under'.

³² Phillips, 'Animal Visual Culture in the Middle Ages'.

materials — may have been used, by association, to assert and elevate one's standing in the Middle Ages.

A sense of order, social unity, and community may have been achieved by observing the animal world and incorporating animals into society in various (visual) ways. Animal representations can indicate human concepts, perceptions, opinions, morals, mythology, fables, and legends relating to people, and to the physical or spiritual worlds that produced them. Unfortunately, it is not certain how a particular misericord was intended to be received, or indeed how it was received by a medieval audience.

The use and meaning attributed to animal misericords is not necessarily consistent through time, or within the same cultural group. The representation of animals on misericords can serve as a manifestation of medieval mentality, demonstrating medieval faith in the existence of a variety of unusual creatures — ones which people did not have the opportunity to see or have experience of in the flesh, ones that we know are not native species, and even ones that did not in fact exist in the real physical world.

There were greater limits and restrictions on the opportunities to increase life experience in the Middle Ages, so a greater reliance and trust was bestowed in other more learned authorities to impart accurate knowledge. Some of the descriptions and images of real creatures that reached medieval audiences would have been just as shocking, outrageous, and unbelievable as the non-real composite and mythological creatures that we are familiar with today.

Animal misericords can only be interpreted insofar as they offer a challenge to our modern day understanding of the medieval thought processes and emotions which influenced their creation and intended function; and they are a more complex construct than can be explained by factors such as ease of depiction, species popularity, the aesthetics of physical appearance, animal associations at a local and regional level, and their use in social, political, and religious practice. Nevertheless, the animals that have survived on the extant misericords can still be valued, and as more are systematically analysed, the medieval scholar will get closer to the true patterns and changes between animal depictions and the visual functions they served, and be able to attempt objective period interpretations about the play of meanings operating within medieval animal images on misericords.

Appendix

Bibliographies of Folk Tales, Fairy Tales, and Myths and Legends

Folk Tales

- Addy, S. O., *Household Tales, with Other Traditional Remains Collected in the Counties of York, Lincoln, Derby, and Nottingham* (London: David Nutt, 1895)
- Ashliman, D. L., *A Guide for Folktales in the English Language* (London: Greenwood, 1987)
- Barrett, W. H., *More Tales from the Fens*, ed. by E. Porter (London: Routledge, 1964)
- , *Tales from the Fens*, ed. by E. Porter (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963)
- Baughman, E. W., *Type and Motif Index of the Folk-Tales of England and North America* (The Hague: Mouton, 1966)
- Bottigheimer, Ruth B., 'Folk Tales, Folk Narrative Research and History', *Social History*, 14 (1989), 343–57
- Briggs, Katharine, *A Dictionary of British Folk-Tales in the English Language*, 2 vols (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970–71)
- , 'Historical Traditions in English Folk-Tales', *Folklore*, 75 (1964), 225–42
- , 'The Transmission of Folk-Tales in Britain', *Folklore*, 79 (1968), 81–91
- Briggs, K. M., and R. L. Tongue, eds, *Folktales of England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965)
- Brunvand, J. H., 'A Classification of Shaggy Dog Stories', *Journal of American Folklore*, 76 (1963), 42–68
- Cunningham, Allan, *Traditional Tales of the English and Scottish Peasantry*, 2 vols (London: Taylor and Hessey, 1874)
- Darnton, Robert, 'Peasants Tell Tales: The Meaning of Mother Goose', in *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), pp. 9–72
- Ellis Davidson, H. R., 'Folklore and History', *Folklore*, 85 (1974), 73–92
- , *Patterns of Folklore* (Ipswich: Brewer, 1978)
- Fox, Adam, *Oral and Literate Culture in England 1500–1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000)
- Gee, H. L., ed., *Folk Tales of Yorkshire* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1960)
- Jeay, Madeleine, 'Sanguine Inscriptions: Mythic and Literary Aspects of a Motif in Chrétien de Troyes's Conte du Graal', in *Telling Tales: Medieval Narratives and the Folk Tradition*, ed. by Francesca Canadé Sautman, Diana Conchado, and Giuseppe Carlo Di Scipio (London: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 137–54
- Jones, Malcolm, 'Folklore Motifs in Late Medieval Art I: Proverbial Follies and Impossibilities', *Folklore*, 100 (1989), 201–17
- , 'Folklore Motifs in Late Medieval Art II: Sexist Satire and Popular Punishments', *Folklore*, 101 (1990), 69–87
- , 'Folklore Motifs in Late Medieval Art III: Erotic Animal Imagery', *Folklore*, 102 (1991), 192–219
- Keding, Dan, and Amy Douglas, eds, *English Folktales* (Englewood: Libraries Unlimited, 2005)
- King, J. R., *Old Tales and New Tales: Charting the Bright-Shadow World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992)

- Luthi, Max, *The European Folk Tale: Form and Nature*, trans. by John D. Niles (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1982; repr. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986)
- Marshall, Sybil, *Everyman's Book of English Folk Tales* (London: Dent, 1981)
- Montgomerie, Norah, and William Montgomerie, eds, *The Folktales of Scotland: The Well at the World's End and Other Stories* (1956; repr. Edinburgh: Mercat, 2005)
- Nicolaisen, W. F. H., 'The Past as Place: Names, Stories, and the Remembered Self', *Folklore*, 102 (1991), 3–15
- Simpson, Jacqueline, 'Fifty British Dragon Tales: An Analysis', *Folklore*, 89 (1978), 79–93
- — —, 'Sussex Local Legends', *Folklore*, 84 (1973), 206–23
- Thomas, Joyce Augusta, 'Some Considerations of Name and Verse in the Folktale', *Lore and Language*, 3 (1982), 42–52
- Thompson, Stith, *The Folktale* (New York: [n.pub.], 1946; repr. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977)
- Weber, Eugen, 'Fairies and Hard Facts: The Reality of Folk Tales', *Journal of History of Ideas*, 42 (1981), 93–113
- Westwood, Jennifer, and Jacqueline Simpson, eds, *The Lore of the Land: A Guide to England's Legends, from Spring-Heeled Jack to the Witches of Warboys* (London: Penguin, 2005)
- Wilson, Anne, *Traditional Romance and Tale: How Stories Mean* (Ipswich: Brewer, 1976)

Fairy Tales

- Anderson, Graham, *Fairytale in the Ancient World* (London: Routledge, 2000)
- Blamires, David, 'The Challenge of Fairytales to Literary Studies', *Critical Quarterly*, 21 (1979), 33–40
- Bottigheimer, Ruth B., *Fairy Tales and Society: Illusion, Allusion, and Paradigm* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987)
- Da Silva, Francisco Vaz., *Metamorphosis: The Dynamics of Symbolism in European Fairy Tales* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002)
- Ellis Davidson, Hilda, and Anna Chaudhri, eds, *Companion to the Fairy Tale* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2003)
- Ferguson, Mary, 'Folklore in the Lais of Marie de France', *Romanic Review*, 77 (1966), 3–24
- Hartland, E. S., *The Science of Fairy Tales: An Enquiry into Fairy Mythology* (London, 1891; repr. Detroit: Singing Tree, 1968)
- Holbek, Bengt, *Interpretation of Fairy Tales: Danish Folklore in a European Perspective*, Folklore Fellows' Communication, 239 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1987)
- Jackson, Anthony, 'The Science of Fairy Tales?', *Folklore*, 84 (1973), 120–41
- Jacobs, Joseph, ed., *English Fairy Tales*, 3rd edn (London: David Nutt, 1898)
- — —, ed., *More English Fairy Tales* (London: David Nutt, 1894)
- Krappe, Alexander Haggerty, *The Fairy Tale: The Science of Folklore* (1930; repr. London: Methuen, 1974)
- Lakoff, George P., 'Structural Complexity in Fairy Tales', *Study of Man*, 1 (1972), 128–50

- Lüthi, Max, *Once Upon a Time: On the Nature of Fairy Tales*, trans. by L. Chadeayne and Paul Gottwald (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1970; repr. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976)
- Messerli, Alfred, 'Spatial Representation in European Popular Fairy Tales', *Marvels and Tales*, 19 (2005), 274–84
- Opie, Iona, and Peter Opie, eds, *The Classic Fairy Tales* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974)
- Tatar, Maria, *The Classic Fairy Tales* (New York: Norton, 1999)
- Thomas, Joyce, *Inside the Wolf's Belly: Aspects of the Fairy Tale* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988)
- Zipes, Jack, *Why Fairy Tales Stick* (London: Routledge, 2006)
- — —, ed., *The Great Fairy Tale Tradition: From Straparola and Basile to the Brothers Grimm* (New York: Norton, 2001)
- — —, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)

Myths and Legends

- Anderson, Mary D., *The Imagery of British Churches* (London: Murray, 1955)
- Balfour, M. C., 'Legends of the Lincolnshire Cars', *Folklore*, 2 (1891), 145–70, 257–83, and 401–18
- Harland, John, and T. T. Wilkinson, *Lancashire Legends, Traditions, Pageants, Sports, etc.* (London: Routledge, 1873; repr. Wakefield: EP Publishing, 1873)
- Horn, Darwin, 'Tiddy Man's Curse and the Ecological Consequences of Land Reclamation', *Folklore*, 98 (1987), 11–15
- Hultin, N. C., 'Belief and Interpretation in T. Crofton Croker's Legends of the Lakes', *Folklore*, 98 (1987), 65–79
- Menefee, S. P., 'A Cake in the Furrow', *Folklore*, 91 (1980), 173–92
- Mode, H., *Fabulous Beasts and Demons* (London: Phaidon, 1973)
- Patten, Bob, and Jacqueline Patten, 'Rab Channing: Life and Legends', *Folklore*, 97 (1986), 56–62

BESTIARIES IN WOOD? MISERICORDS, ANIMAL IMAGERY, AND THE BESTIARY TRADITION

Luuk Houwen

Although in the past misericords have been somewhat neglected by art historians because of their popular background, these carved oak blocks found as part of mercy-seats in choir stalls of cathedrals, collegiate churches, and abbeys in certain parts of Western Europe from the late twelfth century onwards have in recent years been attracting more attention. Book-length studies have appeared on misericords in the Iberian Peninsula, France, the Low Countries, Germany, and Britain, and more are on the way.¹ Articles abound and they even have their own journal, *The Profane Arts*, published by Misericordia International. Animal imagery on misericords has received its fair share of attention, and much progress has been made on the identification and classification of different scenes. The actual interpretation of animal depictions on misericords is a different matter,

All misericord photographs are the author's and are published with permission of the (Deans and Chapters of Gloucester, Ripon, Lincoln, and Chester Cathedrals.

¹ Elaine C. Block was in the process of describing all misericords found throughout Europe before her untimely death, and three volumes in the *Corpus of Medieval Misericords* series, those devoted to Iberia, France, and the Low Countries, have so far seen the light. Other volumes on Germany and Great Britain were on the way: *Corpus of Medieval Misericords: Iberia* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005); *Corpus of Medieval Misericords: France* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003); *Corpus of Medieval Misericords: Belgium and the Netherlands*, ed. by Frédéric Billiet, Jos Koldeweij, and Christel Theunissen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010). See also Elaine C. Block, *Misericords in the Rhineland: Images of Medieval Life* (Lakewood: R. D. Sheldon, 1996). For Britain, see Charles Tracy, *English Gothic Choir-Stalls 1200–1400* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1987), and Tracy, *English Gothic Choir-Stalls 1400–1540* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1990), and also Christa Grössinger, *The World Upside-Down: English Misericords* (London: Harvey Miller, 1997).

however. The imagery on misericords is far from uniform and derives from many different traditions. Some of it is inspired by fables, beast epic, or romances; some of it is heraldic in nature; sometimes the carvers turn to model books, playing cards, and the like; and at times they appear to be inspired by the world around them. Animal imagery is often interpreted as reflecting the bestiary tradition, but such readings rarely progress much beyond the inevitable references to bestiaries (and the *Physiologus*) with their moralized animal lore and well-developed animal iconography. In what follows I shall evaluate the various ways in which such animal imagery can be read and was likely to be read in later medieval times. I shall concentrate on animal imagery found on three sets of British choir stalls, but I expect my conclusions should also be valid for many other stalls in Britain and on the continent. It will be argued that moral-didactic interpretations of animal imagery on misericords favoured by many critics are fraught with difficulties for a variety of methodological and other reasons. This inevitably has serious consequences, and it is my contention that to interpret much animal imagery on misericords based on the (possible) sources creates more problems than it solves, and that we therefore may be forced to regard this imagery in a completely different light.

The identification of animals on misericords is not always an easy task. Some animals lend themselves better for this purpose than others. Elephants may not often look like their real-life counterparts but their trunks, not to mention the castles they bear on their backs, allow for easy identification. Foxes are not that distinct from other small carnivorous quadrupeds but are generally easy to identify thanks to their bushy tails. If they carry a bird in their mouths we can often contextualize those and identify them either as cocks or geese depending on the presence or absence of a comb or webbed feet. The narrative context can be of great help as well: if a largish quadruped is chained and attacked by what look like dogs, it is not that difficult to surmise we here have a bear-baiting scene. Similarly, when a man (on a horse) is attacking a winged, two- or four-legged serpent with a spear, it is not too farfetched to identify him with St George or, if he has wings, with St Michael and the animal as a wyvern or dragon.

Well-known beasts and birds like horses, deer, or owls rarely present serious problems. However, when an animal or bird has few if any obvious characteristics this changes and interpretation turns into speculation. One quadruped without distinctive characteristics is pretty much like any other, and one is hard put to decide between a dog, a wolf, a leopard, or a hyena. The same is true for other classes of animals: one serpent can look much like any other, and many a bird is no more than just that, and scholars who have tried to be more precise have come in

for a lot of criticism.² This holds true even more for composite creatures. There are of course a few which are readily identifiable, especially those with a long, classical, ancestry like griffins, unicorns, sirens, and centaurs. Mermaids are not normally misinterpreted either, but what about that large group of creatures made up of body parts from different creatures? Sometimes it would seem that the more outrageous the composition the better the artist liked it. The most outrageous of them tend to be dismissed as grotesques; others have their status raised and enter the books as monsters. When such animals turn up in the bestiaries the text usually makes clear what is intended, but without any accompanying text we cannot be so certain. The problem is compounded when the depictions fall into the category called 'portraits', that is, imagery appearing in isolation without any discernible narrative context.³ Similarly, when artists are confronted with non-native species of which they had no firsthand knowledge they tend to resort to what they know already, and this can have some surprising results. The crocodile is a famous case in point. In several bestiaries this reptile looks more like a large quadruped with a strange tail and legs than anything else, and unless it has been painted yellow (*L croceus*⁴) one requires the text to make sense of it. Unfortunately, unlike bosses, there is little if any evidence to suggest that misericords were ever painted.⁵ As a monochrome carving such an animal would not be recognizable. Even when animals are clearly distinct, artists sometimes ignore the individual characteristics and depict very similar animals. This is the case, for example, in the Merton College copy of Philippe de Thaon's Anglo-Norman bestiary, where the artist repeatedly uses the same beast to represent different animals like the elephant and the crocodile, and the same holds true for some of the bestiary imagery in the Queen Mary Psalter.⁶ If

² The writings of Wilma George and Brunson Yapp come to mind, especially their book on the natural world in the bestiary, *The Naming of the Beasts: Natural History in the Medieval Bestiary* (London: Duckworth, 1991).

³ Debra Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries: Text, Image, Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 10. The distinction between portraits and narrative visual imagery is also drawn by Willene B. Clark in *The Medieval Book of Birds: Hugh of Fouillois's Aviarium*, ed. and trans. by Clark (Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1992), pp. 11, 31, 32, etc.

⁴ Cf. Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae XII / Etymologies Livre XII Des Animaux*, ed. by Jacques André (Paris: Belles lettres, 1986), 6.19.

⁵ See Tracy, *English Gothic Choir-Stalls 1200–1400*, p. 4; the topic is also briefly touched upon in Martial Rose, *The Misericords of Norwich Cathedral* (Dereham: Larks, 1994), p. 7.

⁶ Florence McCulloch, *Mediaeval Latin and French Bestiaries* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), pp. 75–76.

such works were to serve as model books, the final result would be very difficult to identify indeed.

Although it is rarely made explicit, it is not difficult to see why many scholars fall back on bestiaries when interpreting medieval depictions of animals. Bestiaries, among which they normally also count the *Physiologus*, provide a convenient catalogue of moralized animals, and they constitute the building blocks for subsequent interpretations elsewhere.⁷ When bestiaries can contain more than 120 illustrated animal chapters the pickings are very rich indeed for medieval artists and modern interpreters alike.⁸ Moreover, bestiaries tended to be widely disseminated, and most were produced before the end of the fourteenth century with a peak in production in the thirteenth century, thus they antedate the vast majority of misericords. Finally, many of the institutions harbouring choir stalls (cathedrals, collegiate churches, abbey churches) may have had libraries, however small, and among the larger of them one would have expected one or more illuminated bestiary manuscripts. In view of this, it is perhaps understandable that bestiary influence is generally assumed rather than argued. This is not the place for a comprehensive study of bestiary imagery on British misericords,⁹ but I would like to consider animal imagery on misericords in somewhat greater detail and review the arguments for and against such a case. I have selected the stalls of Gloucester, Lincoln, and Ripon, partly because the medieval stalls are still in situ, but also because their misericords encompass quite a good spread, both in time and in number.¹⁰

⁷ In, for example, encyclopaedias, sermons, and a wide variety of moral-didactic treatises.

⁸ I am using bestiaries in the generic sense but have primarily the so-called second family in mind. Not only is this the largest group of related texts among the various 'families', it is also the one where the vast majority of manuscripts have an English provenance. This group at present numbers some forty-nine manuscripts. See Willene B. Clark, *A Medieval Book of Beasts* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006), p. 12.

⁹ Although I have studied and photographed many sets of choir stalls much still remains to be done. G. L. Remnant, *A Catalogue of Misericords in Great Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), though interesting and useful, is too flawed to be of much use in any systematic investigation and classification. Elaine Block's forthcoming volume on Britain and Ireland in the Corpus of Medieval Misericords series is eagerly awaited.

¹⁰ Gloucester is a good example of a relatively early set of misericords (c. 1350), at least among those that offer more than just floral patterns. Lincoln Cathedral has a large number of stalls dating to c. 1370, whereas the thirty-four stalls in Ripon Minster serve as a good example of fifteenth-century work (c. 1488–94), work moreover that left its mark on the later stalls in Manchester Cathedral and Beverley Minster. For the dates, see Tracy, *English Gothic Choir-Stalls 1400–1540*, pp. xxiii and xix.

Table 1. Animal misericords.

Totals	Total no. of misericords	No. of animal misericords	%	Total no. of portraits	Total no. of narrative scenes	Total no. of scenes	%
Gloucester	46	35	76	4	29	33	88
Lincoln	92	59	64	91	37	128	29
Ripon	33	22	67	18	15	33	45

Of the fifty-eight misericords in Gloucester cathedral forty-six are thought to be medieval; the rest are nineteenth-century replacements (Table 1).¹¹ The misericords on the south side of the choir are the earliest ones (c. 1340); the north stalls were not completed until some twenty years later. Gloucester's misericords are unusual in that they lack supporters and are enclosed by trefoil frames, which Grössinger compares to some of the scenes in the Psalter of Robert de Lisle (London, British Library, MS Arundel 83, *a.* 1339).¹² Almost eighty percent of the misericords depict animal scenes.¹³ The percentages are a little lower for Lincoln cathedral, which has one of the largest choirs in Britain with ninety-two stalls of which almost two-thirds are devoted to animals. Although Ripon only sports a medium-sized choir, its proportion of animal carvings is similar, with some 67 per cent of the carvings inspired by the natural world. Craftsmen associated with the Ripon workshop of William Bromflet are thought to be responsible for the carvings, which date from the late fifteenth century (1489–94). The same Ripon School of woodworkers is also thought to have carved the misericords at Manchester and Beverley.¹⁴

In not all scenes are animals the main theme. Some eight misericords at Gloucester may be regarded as marginal in this respect in that the animals either

¹¹ Remnant, *Catalogue of Misericords in Great Britain*, pp. 49–52. Remnant also attempts to identify the modern misericords, but his identifications should be treated with some caution, if only because the actual enumeration of misericords is somewhat muddled. Cf. also Jack Farley, *The Misericords of Gloucester Cathedral* (Gloucester: Jack Farley, The King's School, 1981), unpaginated Introduction. The nineteenth-century misericords have been ignored in this study.

¹² Christa Grössinger, 'English Misericords of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries and their Relationship to Manuscript Illuminations', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 38 (1975), 97–108 (p. 108). For the date, see Michael Camille, *Gothic Art: Glorious Visions* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996), p. 94.

¹³ For these and subsequent totals, see Table 1.

¹⁴ See especially Tracy, *English Gothic Choir-Stalls 1400–1540*, pp. 16–31; Grössinger, *World Upside-Down*, p. 24.

appear as supporters or play subsidiary roles,¹⁵ like the ram in Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, the horses ridden by knights or hunters, the dragon being speared by St Michael, a lady accompanied by a small dog, or the shepherds with their sheep and dog on their way to Bethlehem.¹⁶ The situation is not that different at Lincoln where the number of marginal animal depictions is quite similar to that of Gloucester and so is their subject matter, with a mixture of biblical scenes (Samson and the lion, the Adoration of the Magi with an ox and possibly an ass in the stable), episodes from everyday life (ploughing), and the realm of chivalry and romance (knights and their horses; Yvain's horse about to be severed by a portcullis; a dog accompanying Tristan and Isolde; Alexander's Flight).¹⁷ Ripon only has two more or less marginal scenes and both depict Jonah and the whale.¹⁸

Although the percentage of misericords with animals is rather large for all three choirs, with anything between two-thirds and three-quarters of all misericords sporting one or more animals, the actual range of animals is limited (Table 2). Of the almost three hundred animals that appear on the misericords of the choirs under consideration, there are a mere forty different ones. Wild animals, both indigenous and exotic, predominate (Chart 1), making up almost half of the total number. Among them we find bears, cranes, and deer as well as elephants, apes, and pelicans. The twelve different domestic animals cover all the usual species from asses to sheep among the mammals, and from cocks to peacocks among the birds. All in all they make up about a third of the whole. Mythological animals, among which we find the centaur, the siren, the mermaid, various composite animals, and of course the dragon and wyvern, make up the smallest group.

It is interesting to note that even though Lincoln has the most animals in absolute terms, it is also the choir with the least variety (Chart 2). Its hundred and sixty-four animals encompass only twenty-four 'species' (14.6%), as compared to

¹⁵ Two deer appear on the left and right — more or less in the supporter-position — of a scene depicting a man accompanied by two boys near a tree that is either damaged or in the process of being cut down (NSfW03). All place references to misericords distinguish between the north and south side (NS, SS) and start counting, where present, from the returned stalls in the west towards the east (fW). When necessary, rows are also numbered, starting with the back row of stalls (R1).

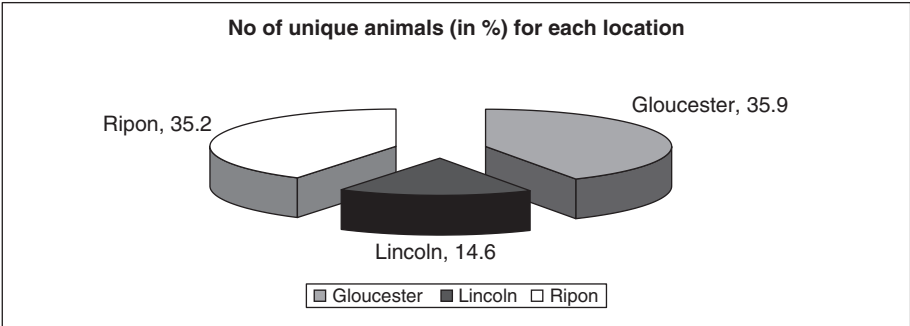
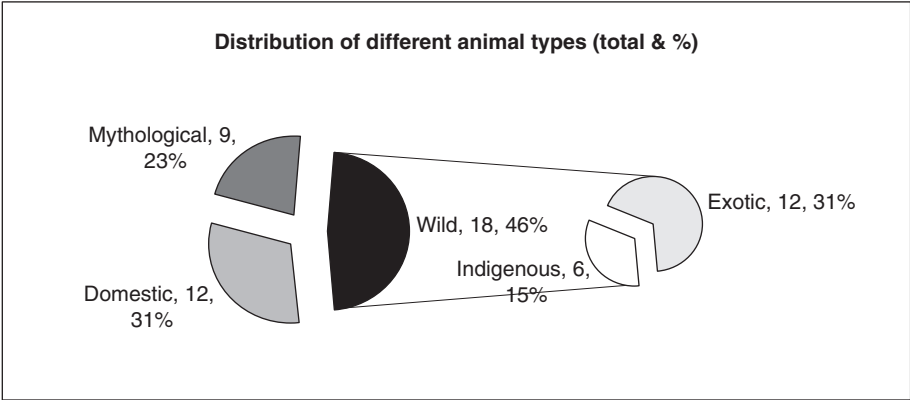
¹⁶ NSfW10, NSfW07, NSfW21, SSfW03, NSfW22, SSfW10.

¹⁷ SSfWR2_08 (Samson and the lion), SSfWR1_09 (Adoration of the Magi), NSfWR1_22 (two oxen and horses ploughing), SSfWR1_02 (knight falling off his horse), SSfWR1_14 (knight lying beside his horse), NSfWR1_08 (horse hit by portcullis), SSfWR1_06 (Tristan and Isolde), SSfWR1_07 (Alexander's Flight), SSfWR2_13 (St George and dragon).

¹⁸ SSfW08, SSfW14.

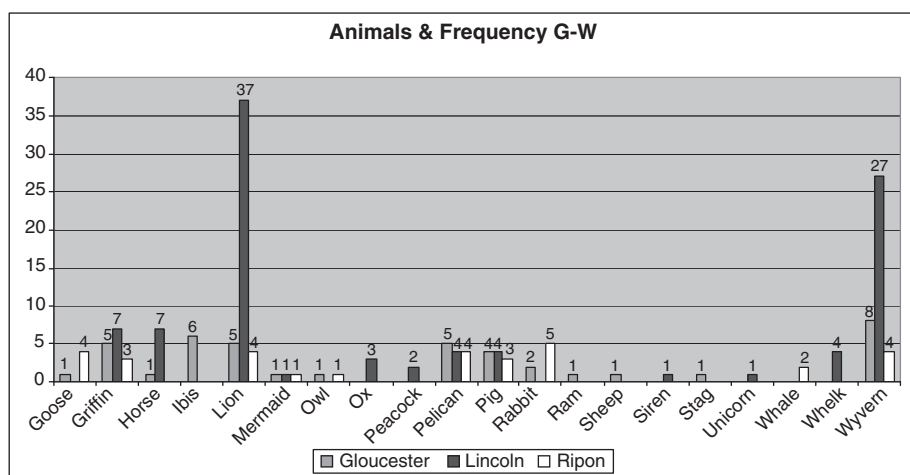
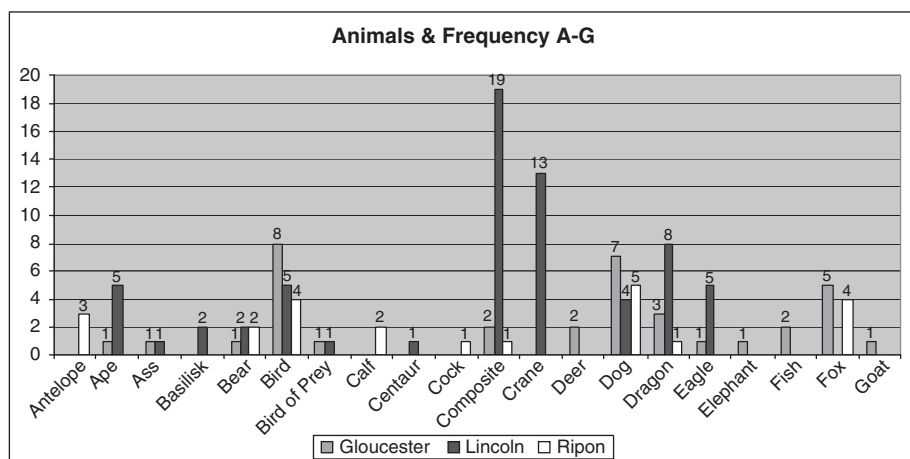
Table 2. Number of Unique Animals.

	Total	Unique	%	Ratio
Gloucester	78	28	35.9	2.8
Lincoln	164	24	14.6	6.8
Ripon	54	19	35.2	2.8



Ripon and Gloucester, where more than one in three animals are different (35%). One might argue that it stands to reason that the larger the choir the more difficult it becomes to vary the creatures, and there is some truth in this; on the other hand, Gloucester with its seventy-eight animals has almost half again as many as Ripon’s fifty-four, and yet its artist(s) managed to vary the animals just as much.

Of all the animals the lion and the heraldic dragon — the wyvern — are the most popular, appearing forty-six and thirty-nine times respectively (Charts 3 and 4). The carvers at Lincoln certainly appear to have made good use of these animals.



Also fashionable are composite animals (22), birds (17), dogs (16), griffins (15), cranes (13), pelicans (13), and pigs (11). These figures should be treated with a little caution because some carvings depict multiple instances of the same species and thereby skew the statistics in their favour. The thirteen cranes at Lincoln, for example, appear on only three misericords,¹⁹ and a sow playing the bagpipes is inevitably accompanied by some dancing piglets, as she is at Ripon.²⁰ Moreover, animals appearing in one supporter are often, though not always, mirrored in the other, thus leading to a higher number of instances on one and the same misericords.

¹⁹ NSfWR1_12 (5), NSfWR2_22 (4), SSfWR1_17 (4).

²⁰ SSfW07.

None of this affects the relative numbers of the most frequent animals in any dramatic way though.

Another way to approach the animals is to distinguish between portraits and narrative scenes (see Table 1).²¹ It should be noted that since the link between supporters and the central scene of the misericords is generally very loose, I distinguish between them. A misericord with supporters consequently numbers three scenes, except when the supporters belong to the main scene.²² The reasons for drawing a distinction between a portrait and a narrative scene are both textual and iconographic. First, portraits, even if they were to bear some iconographical resemblance to the bestiaries, cannot carry the corresponding message since iconographically they lack a narrative context and have no text to fill the lacuna. Without such a context the actual source of the image becomes irrelevant.²³ Second, this same lack of context makes it all the more difficult to say with any certainty from what sort of iconographic tradition the image is taken: carvers certainly did not depend on bestiaries to carve portraits of lions, griffins, dragons, or other creatures. Hassig notes that in the bestiaries portraits play an important role and can account for almost 50 per cent of all images.²⁴ At Lincoln the number of portraits on misericords is even larger.²⁵ Of the hundred and twenty-eight animal scenes only some thirty-seven are of a narrative nature (29%). Gloucester once again shows itself to be quite special in that of the thirty-three scenes only four are portraits, which means that some 88 per cent of all the scenes are narrative. Ripon holds the middle ground with an almost equal division between narrative and non-narrative scenes.

²¹ Scenes cover both the central image on a misericord and, where applicable, each of the supporters.

²² See Ripon SSfW 10.

²³ Among the portraits I include not only single animals depicted with little or no background, but also pairs of animals that do not interact and are placed together in a more or less formal way (face to face, addorsed). I have also included single animals engaged in some sort of basic action, be it birds preening or lions sleeping. I have also included mermaids holding fishes as in Gloucester as well as the lone elephant with howdah among the portraits, but not the mermaid with comb and mirror, because of its emblematic quality (see below).

²⁴ Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries*, p. 10.

²⁵ It is unlikely that a better understanding of what is depicted on misericords will affect the total numbers in any dramatic way, because all scenes showing some interaction between participants, even if they are not (fully) understood, are counted among the narrative scenes. Only a better understanding of what scenes are emblematic (like the mermaid with her accoutrements) could increase the figures mentioned here, but such scenes are relatively rare.

These numbers show how frequent animal imagery is on misericords, even if it does not always form the central element in the carving and even if the actual range of creatures depicted is limited. The statistics also confirm the high rate of repetition at Lincoln and the special status of the Gloucester misericords. On the whole, however, they confirm what one knew or at least suspected already. To learn more we must examine the misericords in greater detail. One question that comes to mind is *what* exactly is depicted. The answer will help us to better evaluate the central issue of the bestiary influence.

Narrative scenes not only facilitate the identification of the animal(s) involved, they also hint at possible sources. Certain animals often found grouped together suggest fable or beast epic backgrounds. The almost ubiquitous fox is well represented in two of the three choirs under consideration.²⁶ Ripon has four of them, three of which are presented in sequence on the north side of the choir.²⁷ In the first we see him as a preacher, a scene that is quite common on later misericords. His audience here consists of both a cock and a goose (or duck); their raised heads indicate the interest with which they are attending the sermon. The fact that both a cock and a goose are depicted may be indicative that the carvers were aware of both the beast epic and the popular traditions:

It is as if these carvers were conscious of the two main sources of inspiration, the literary (Beast Epic) one in which the cock plays the chief role, and the folklore one in which the goose is more prominent.²⁸

In the second scene we see him carry off a goose while another appears to be waiting its turn. In the third scene, the fox is attacked by two dogs, both of whom have already sunk their teeth in his body. The fox and goose scene is then repeated on the south side in somewhat greater detail. There a woman with a distaff is carved on the left together with a dog on the right supporting the central scene in

²⁶ For a recent overview, see Elaine C. Block and Kenneth Varty, 'Choir-Stall Carvings of Reynard and Other Foxes', in *Reynard the Fox: Social Engagement and Cultural Metamorphoses in the Beast Epic from the Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. by Kenneth Varty (New York: Berghahn, 2000), pp. 125–62.

²⁷ NSfW 11–13.

²⁸ Block and Varty, 'Choir-Stall Carvings of Reynard', p. 143. For a discussion of the 'folklore', see L. A. J. R. Houwen, 'Every Picture Tells a Story: The Importance of Images in the Wider Dissemination and Reception of Texts', in *Language and Text: Current Perspectives on English and Germanic Historical Linguistics and Philology*, ed. by Andrew James Johnston, Ferdinand von Mengden, and Stefan Thim (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2006), pp. 99–113.



Figure 72. Fox and goose, Ripon Cathedral, SSfW 10.

which a fox runs off with a goose in his beak (Figure 72).²⁹ This scene may be indebted to the same tradition that informed the central episode in Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale*,³⁰ although it is remarkable that the woman at Ripon is actually smiling. Many years ago Kenneth Varty commented on this and concluded that 'she has rather too benign an expression on her face for one aware of the fact that her poultry is being stolen'.³¹ This is but one example of how an artist can reinterpret a source in a way that is not at all consonant with that source.³²

²⁹ SSfW 10.

³⁰ For the possible influence of Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale*, see Paul Hardwick, 'Foxing Daun Russell: Moral Lessons of Poultry on Misericords and in Literature', *Reynardus*, 17 (2004), 85–94.

³¹ Kenneth Varty, 'The Pursuit of Reynard in Medieval English Literature and Art', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 8 (1964), 62–81 (p. 72).

³² Another example in this context that comes to mind is the wonderful depiction of Tibert biting off the naked priest's testicles while his concubine wields a distaff, his son holds the rope with which Tibert has been ensnared, and Reynard watches the whole scene. The woman in the carving is smiling broadly, which is rather unexpected considering that her lover is about to be emasculated (perhaps she is anticipating the beating she is about to give poor Tibert). The carving may be indebted to a woodcut, one of which survives in Wynkyn de Worde's illustrated edition of c. 1495. If

A fox with a stolen goose in its mouth also appears at Gloucester,³³ but it is not the only misericord in which he is the protagonist. In one of these the fox is lodged in a tree with two slightly damaged dogs standing up against it and a hunter with a bow and arrow (also damaged) aiming at him.³⁴ The link between such fox-hunting scenes and the beast epic is a tenuous one, as Varty notes, even though the fox is occasionally hunted in them by humans and fellow animals.³⁵ Another fox is seen in the guise of a fox physician holding a urinal against the light with a sick lion prostrate at his feet (Figure 73).³⁶ A fourth is pounced upon by an eagle. This may well be the fox cub of the fable of the fox and the eagle familiar to a medieval English audience from the fable of that name by Marie de France or William Caxton.³⁷ This fable recounts how the eagle steals one of the fox's cubs which it refuses to return, at which point the fox threatens to set fire to the eagle's nest and only then does the eagle return the cub. The epimythium warns against the arrogance of the high and mighty. It is interesting to note that all these scenes appear on the north side of the choir.³⁸ Only one other possible fable appears, but its interpretation is controversial. On the south side of the choir at Gloucester a man

that is indeed the case the artists certainly made some changes; see Block and Varty, 'Choir-Stall Carvings of Reynard', p. 129.

³³ NSfW 11.

³⁴ NSfW 15.

³⁵ Block and Varty, 'Choir-Stall Carvings of Reynard', p. 149.

³⁶ NSfW 18.

³⁷ For *Del gupil e de l'egle*, see Marie de France, *Fables*, ed. and trans. by Harriet Spiegel (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), pp. 54–57. For Caxton's fable *Of the Egle and of the Foxe*, see William Caxton, *Caxton's Aesop: Edited with an Introduction and Notes by R. T. Lenaghan*, ed. by R. T. Lenaghan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 82. According to Varty the cub does not much look like a fox, but comparison with other foxes shows it to be a fox cub indeed: Kenneth Varty, *Reynard, Renart, Reinart and Other Foxes in Medieval England: The Iconographic Evidence* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999), p. 218. As so often in the case of foxes, the animal's tail helps to make the identification unmistakable.

³⁸ I have ignored misericord 29 on the north side which depicts an animal like a fox eating something from its paws and a preening bird in a tree with two boars and a dog (?) below. Some have argued this is not a fox at all but a squirrel. The animal's pose would certainly favour this interpretation, but its vulpine head contradicts it. Remnant favours the latter interpretation whereas Farley opts for the first: Remnant, *Catalogue of Misericords*, p. 51; Farley, *Misericords of Gloucester Cathedral*. Varty does not mention this misericord at all in his comprehensive listing of fox imagery in Britain; cf. Varty, *Reynard, Renart, Reinart*, p. 307, and Block and Varty, 'Choir-Stall Carvings of Reynard'.



Figure 73. Fox physician, Gloucester Cathedral, NSfW18.

wearing a three-quarter coat is seen lying down with his right arm wrapped around a donkey lying on its side on top of him (Figure 74).³⁹ Farley suggested this may be a reference to the story of Balaam who made his ass speak.⁴⁰ Balaam's ass did indeed fall down in front of the angel of the Lord, but it is difficult to square that dramatic event of divine interference with the rather tranquil scene in the misericord. Another possible reading is that it refers to the Aesopic story *De cane et asino* which narrates how an ass seeing a dog pleasing its lord by jumping into his lap decided to follow suit, only to end up being sorely beaten.⁴¹ If this interpretation is correct,

³⁹ SSfW29.

⁴⁰ Farley, *Misericords of Gloucester Cathedral*, p. 29.

⁴¹ F. Bond, *Wood Carvings in English Churches: Misericords* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1910), p. 85; M. W. Tisdall, *God's Beasts: Identify and Understand Animals in Church Carvings. The Stories That Give Point and Purpose to over One Hundred Varieties of Animal and Other Figures in Our Church Carvings* (Plymouth: Charlesfort, 1998), p. 23. Bond is apparently quite happy to assume that man and donkey are actually standing up, because he suggests they are dancing! The fable was well known. Walter of England compares the ass's jealousy to that of secular men 'who envy the unique gifts of grace bestowed on "bonis hominibus et spiritualibus"': see Walter of England, *The Fables of Walter of England: Edited from Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek*,



Figure 74. Man and donkey, Gloucester Cathedral, SSfW29.

the carving depicts the scene just before the beating. It may well be that the horizontal plane in which the carver had to work goes some way towards explaining the position of the man and the animal, but it still does not explain why the former embraces the latter rather than defending himself against this oversized lapdog.

Biblical and hagiographical scenes, among which I include St George or St Michael and the dragon, are another popular topic. However, as noted before, the animals in these scenes play a somewhat marginal role.⁴² The same holds true for many of the carvings inspired by the world of chivalry and romance, most of which have been touched upon earlier as well.⁴³ A narrative exception is Alexander's Flight which appears thrice, twice at Gloucester and once at Lincoln.⁴⁴ The Greek Alexander romance relates how Alexander wanted to inspect the heavens in a

Codex Gualferbytanus 185 Helmstadiensis, ed. by A. E. Wright (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1997), pp. 10–11 and 56–58. The fable is also told by Marie de France (no. 15); see de France, *Fables*, pp. 68–71. For Caxton's version, see *Caxton's Aesop*, ed. by Lenaghan, pp. 85–86.

⁴² See pp. 203–04. Both Old and New Testament scenes are found at all three of the stalls.

⁴³ See p. 204.

⁴⁴ SSfW08, SSfW26, and SSfWR1_07 respectively.

basket carried by two griffins but was stopped by divine interference which caused him to be hurled back to earth. This romance reached the west in the form of the *Historia de preliis Alexandri Magni*, which in turn formed the basis of many of the vernacular accounts. Schmidt notes it is the only episode in the West from Alexander's life that exists as an independent tradition in manuscript illuminations, frescoes, tapestries, and carvings. It was a very popular theme for misericords but appears throughout Western Europe many centuries before the first misericords in Romanesque art.⁴⁵

Among scenes from everyday life on British misericords hunting scenes are among the most popular, and among them, Grössinger notes, the largest number are concerned with the deer hunt.⁴⁶ Gloucester has a very fine example of this. It shows a hunter with tightened bow about to let fly his arrow (Figure 75).⁴⁷ The bow is partly damaged and the arrow has gone, but his posture and the fact that the splendid stag at which he is aiming has not actually been shot yet reveal this to be the case. Further down towards the east a hunter on horseback blowing a horn is seen riding in full gallop accompanied by a dog, his coat trailing behind him in the wind.⁴⁸ As in the previous misericord the artist has managed to bring out the movement and drama very well. Just as vibrant is a hawking scene on the south side in which a bearded man wearing an odd hood on a horse is pursuing a hawk attacking a duck, while a second man is beating a drum with which to flush the birds.⁴⁹ At Lincoln a woman with a hawk or falcon on her wrist and a dog at her feet appears on the left supporter and points towards the main scene which shows two cranes in what resembles a courtship ritual, but may just be an elegant way of circumventing the constraints imposed upon the artists by the misericord.⁵⁰ Be that as it may, cranes were habitually hunted, usually with a (gyr-)falcon.⁵¹

⁴⁵ See Victor M. Schmidt, *A Legend and its Image: The Aerial Flight of Alexander the Great in Medieval Art*, Mediaevalia Groningana, 17 (Groningen: Forsten, 1995), pp. 14 and 167–209 (Catalogue).

⁴⁶ Grössinger, *World Upside-Down*, pp. 165, 166.

⁴⁷ NSfW05.

⁴⁸ NSfW21.

⁴⁹ SSfW27.

⁵⁰ NSfWR2_22.

⁵¹ Cf. for example J. G. Cummins, *The Hound and the Hawk: The Art of Medieval Hunting* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988), p. 204, and Baudouin van den Abeele, *La Fauconnerie au moyen âge: connaissance, affaitage et médecine des oiseaux de chasse d'après les traités latins*, Collection Sapience (Paris: Editions Klincksieck, 1994), pp. 27, 59.



Figure 75. Hunter shooting at stag, Gloucester Cathedral, NSfW05.

Animals also feature in other settings related to everyday life. Two supporters at Lincoln encompass a ploughing and a harrowing scene, both of which may well be inspired by medieval calendar illuminations, just like the one with pigs feeding on acorns.⁵² A crane eating from a sack of grain and a boy with a sling and a dead crane behind him both appear as supporters to a somewhat puzzling main scene in which a boy or a pygmy is astride one crane, holding it firmly by the neck, while two others peck at him.⁵³ The supporters probably allude to the fact that cranes were considered a pest because they tended to devastate newly sown fields. The stalls at Gloucester also have an example of that popular medieval and Renaissance entertainment, bear-baiting,⁵⁴ and an image of a tree being cut down. This last scene has puzzled some scholars who see in it a woman with two boys, but the bone structure of the face, not to mention the presence of a beard and moustache, suggests otherwise.⁵⁵

⁵² NSfWR1_22 (supporters) and NSfWR1_05 (supporters).

⁵³ Lincoln NSfWR1_12.

⁵⁴ SSfW05.

⁵⁵ See Remnant, *Catalogue of Misericords*, p. 52; Farley, *Misericords of Gloucester Cathedral*, no. 56.

Not every scene I have classified under narrative tells a story. Some are inspired more by a concept or an idea. One such concept is that of enmity or antipathy, and nothing is more popular in our stalls than two creatures fighting each other.⁵⁶ Very often this is a fight between two animals, but fights between wild men and animals and men and animals also appear with some regularity. Quite typical for this genre are the scenes where two animals are more or less intertwined so that it is not always easy to see where one beast ends and the other begins. Quite often they have already sunk their teeth into each other. Again and again one encounters lions and wyverns either fighting their own kind or each other (Figure 76).⁵⁷ Conflicts between wild men and lions are also a frequently recurring topic, possibly because the wild man was regarded as the Lord of the Beasts,⁵⁸ or because he needed a lion's skin with which to clothe himself in his fight against the Sagittarii,⁵⁹ although for the latter suggestion to carry any weight one would expect more depictions of wild men dressed in the skins of lions. Either way, it is undeniable that wild men were very popular towards the end of the Middle Ages. We find them at Lincoln fighting either a griffin or lions.⁶⁰

Before we turn to the bestiary animals a word on heraldry. The heraldic influence on animal carvings should not be underestimated.⁶¹ Although scholars acknowledge the occasional use of heraldry on misericords in the form of coats of arms which establish affiliations or patronage, they generally ignore the possible influence of heraldic *designs* on the iconography of some misericord images. In all of Christa Grössinger's wonderful book on British misericords, there are fewer

⁵⁶ The notion of sympathy and antipathy goes back to antiquity and is rooted in classical science. It encompasses not just animals, but everything from water putting out fire to magnets attracting or repelling each other. It is an important structural principle behind Pliny's *Natural History* (cf. the opening of book 20). See also Roger French, *Ancient Natural History*, Sciences of Antiquity (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 46.

⁵⁷ Gloucester: NSfW 14, NSfW 16, NSfW 25, SSfW 02. Lincoln: NSfWR2_05, SSfWR1_28, SSfWR2_10, SSfWR2_12, SSfWR2_24. Ripon: NSfW 14, SSfW 03.

⁵⁸ Grössinger, *World Upside-Down*, p. 145.

⁵⁹ G. C. Druce, 'Some Abnormal and Composite Human Forms in English Church Architecture', *Archaeological Journal*, 72 (1915), 135–86 (p. 160).

⁶⁰ SSfWR1_10 (griffin), SSfWR1_03 (lion), SSfWR1_20 (lion), SSfWR1_29 (lion).

⁶¹ Heraldry in the strict sense of the word had been around since the second quarter of the twelfth century. See Gerard J. Brault, *Eight Thirteenth-Century Rolls of Arms in French and Anglo-Norman Blazon* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1973), p. 1.



Figure 76. Lion fighting a wyvern, Lincoln Cathedral, SSfWR1_28.

than a handful of references to heraldry.⁶² Others fare little better.⁶³ This is odd considering the wealth of heraldic designs often found in later medieval churches (and elsewhere) which make it almost unthinkable that it would leave the misericord artists unaffected. Especially among the portraits we regularly encounter animals in a variety of heraldic poses (*sejant*, *statant*, *passant*, and *couchant*, to name but a few).⁶⁴ Perhaps we should bear in mind Fox-Davies's remark that 'there is

⁶² Grössinger, *World Upside-Down*.

⁶³ Anderson does not mention heraldry at all in *Misericords: Medieval Life in English Wood-carving* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1954), and only in connection with coats of arms in his *History and Imagery in British Churches* (London: John Murray, 1971). Only Bond acknowledges throughout his book that certain animals are also found in heraldry and even has a separate chapter devoted to 'Heraldry and Inscriptions' in *Wood Carvings in English Churches: Misericords*, chap. 25.

⁶⁴ Gloucester has a splendid example of a griffin *passant*, i.e. walking with three paws on the ground and the right one raised (Figure 77). Lincoln has several animals in a typically heraldic sitting posture (*sejant*) either facing the viewer (*guardant*) or in profile: NSfWR1_18 (lion; supporters), NSfWR1_20 (lion; right supporter), SSfWR1_16 (dog; left supporter *sejant*, right



Figure 77. Griffin *passant*, Gloucester Cathedral, NSfW09.

nothing peculiarly heraldic' about a lion depicted thus, since they are natural positions for the animal to take,⁶⁵ but how many medieval artists would have encountered lions in such 'natural' poses, let alone griffins or other mythological animals? Another tell-tale sign of heraldic influence is the ubiquitous presence of the wyvern at the expense of the dragon which is relatively rare in comparison. The wyvern is also known as the heraldic dragon, and contrary to the latter, it only has two legs. In our stalls wyverns outnumber dragons three to one (cf. Charts 3 and

supporter *sejant guardant*). A standing griffin (*statant*) also makes an appearance (NSfWR1_21). In the same stalls we also find two bears (?) *addorsed* (SSfWR1_24), and an eagle in a position which Fox-Davies describes as 'rising, wings displayed and inverted' (A. C. Fox-Davies, *A Complete Guide to Heraldry*, ed. by J. P. Brooke-Little (London: Orbis, 1985), p. 178) and several other animals whose postures suggest a heraldic influence. Ripon, finally, has a very impressive example of a griffin *statant* (SSfW 11), and an imposing carving of an owl in a posture Fox-Davies terms 'rising, wings elevated and displayed' (*ibid.*); it may also have a lion *couchant regardant* (?) (NSfW01), but its position is not entirely clear. These are but a few of the most obvious examples, others could be adduced.

⁶⁵ Fox-Davies, *Complete Guide to Heraldry*, p. 2.



Figure 78. Lion with protruding tongue, Lincoln Cathedral, NSfWR2_24.

4). The depictions of animals with protruding tongues (Figure 78) also attest to a heraldic influence. Lions and other animals with protruding tongues are a common feature in medieval heraldic illustrations, for which the heralds use the term *langued*, at least when the tongue is in a different colour from the animal itself. The likelihood of a heraldic connection here is strengthened by the fact that the majority of animals affected are indeed heraldic ones such as lions, wyverns, and the like.⁶⁶ Last but not least, most if not all of the crowned, gorged, collared, and chained animals found on misericords suggest a heraldic influence or source.⁶⁷

But what about bestiary imagery? When scholars discuss animal carvings on misericords it is not unusual to come across remarks like ‘the source from which most of the symbolical carvings on the Lincoln stalls were derived was the Bestiary’,⁶⁸ or ‘The Bestiary was a source from which the carvers of misericords

⁶⁶ Lincoln: NSfWR1_01, SSfWR1_12, SSfWR1_15, SSfWR1_29, SSfWR1_30, SSfWR2_02, SSfWR2_05, SSfWR2_09. Ripon: NSfW 01, NSfW 02, NSfW 04(?), SSfW 13.

⁶⁷ Lincoln: SSfWR1_16, SSfWR1_20, SSfWR1_23; Ripon: SSfW 12.

⁶⁸ M. D. Anderson, *The Choir Stalls of Lincoln Minster*, 2nd edn (Lincoln: Friends of Lincoln Cathedral, 1967), p. 27.

took many designs'.⁶⁹ Despite such sweeping statements many of these scholars were aware that one should exercise some caution. When discussing the antelope — a common *Physiologus* and bestiary animal — Gardner acknowledges that 'especially when wearing a collar and chain [it] is more closely allied to the heraldic series', although he cannot resist suggesting that 'of course many heraldic creatures may have been inspired indirectly by the Bestiaries'.⁷⁰ Many years before in his discussion of the misericords in the church of St Mary of Charity at Faversham, Druce already allowed for the possibility that in addition to bestiaries romances may also have influenced the carvings, when he states that 'the subjects represented are of the usual mixed character and from various sources, and are arranged haphazard; from the preponderating number of animals it is likely that the craftsman had access to illuminated MSS., i.e. bestiaries or romances in which animal episodes occur, and borrowed details from the miniatures and adapted them to his purpose'.⁷¹ However, when he later discusses the camel, he cannot resist the temptation to explain the presence of the animal in a church as follows:

There is every reason why the camel should appear in church, as it is illustrated and treated of very fully in the Latin bestiaries, and a notable lesson is attached to it. The information given came from classical sources and describes in great detail the appearance and habits of camels, particularly the structure of their feet which never become sore, as we are told they are provided "with elastic pads of flesh which rise and fall like lungs."

The camel was a type of Christ. As it knelt down to receive its load, so did Christ humble himself to take upon him the sins of the world; and many passages from Scripture are brought into play.⁷²

This is fairly typical for the ambivalent attitude of many scholars towards animals on misericords. On the one hand it is acknowledged that bestiaries are not the sole source of the animal carvings; on the other the fact that the moralizations in the bestiaries may help to explain their presence in the choir proves to be

⁶⁹ Remnant, *Catalogue of Misericords*, p. xxvi. Cf. also Bond, *Wood Carvings in English Churches: Misericords*, p. vii; G. C. Druce, 'The Stall Carvings in the Church of St. Mary of Charity, Faversham', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 50 (1938), 11–32 (p. 12); Arthur Gardner, *Minor English Wood Sculpture, 1400–1550: An Essay on Carved Figures and Animals on Bench-Ends in English Parish Churches* (London: Tiranti, 1958), p. 32; and Grössinger, *World Upside-Down*, p. 13.

⁷⁰ Gardner, *Minor English Wood Sculpture*, p. 34.

⁷¹ Druce, 'Stall Carvings in the Church of St Mary of Charity, Faversham', p. 12. A similar statement can be found in Grössinger, *World Upside-Down*, p. 13. For other examples, see Gardner, *Minor English Wood Sculpture*, p. 32.

⁷² Druce, 'Stall Carvings in the Church of St Mary of Charity, Faversham', p. 17.

irresistible. Often, this appears to be the only reason why the moralization associated with an animal in the bestiary is mentioned, since it is rare for the moralization to play any further role in the discussions. Moreover, the rather careless fusion of the iconographic and the textual has also muddled many a discussion. In what follows I would first like to consider the impact of the bestiaries on the animal imagery found on the misericords, and then I shall turn my attention to the textual tradition and consider the issue of possible moralizations.

The animals drawn from such realms as the beast epic, fable, the Bible, romances, chivalry, and daily life obviously go back to a different iconographic tradition and can be safely excluded from the following discussion. So do a number of others that have not been discussed because they are relatively rare or cannot be so easily categorized as the others. Among them we find humorous scenes like a sow playing the bagpipes while two piglets dance,⁷³ or the ape riding what may be a horse, donkey, or even a unicorn, wearing a collar, brandishing a mace, and confronting another ape.⁷⁴ The combat scenes discussed earlier do occur in bestiaries, but there the most popular ones are between dragon and elephant and crocodile and hydrus. Moreover, scenes focusing on creatures fighting each other are popular outside the bestiaries as well and need not necessarily have a bestiary source. In this respect it is important to bear in mind that the mere fact that a carving (closely) resembles a scene from a bestiary is in itself not enough to establish a connection. It is only when such scenes can *only* be found in the bestiary that we can safely assume the one to have served as a source for the other. This, of course, is extremely difficult to establish.

On closer inspection it emerges that only a handful of carvings present themselves as likely candidates for a bestiary provenance, especially after we have excluded the animal portraits. Because of their lack of narrative context and their stylized nature (the vast majority present lions, dragons, and other creatures *en profile*, in a sitting position) it would be very difficult to establish a source for the portraits, a problem that is compounded by the fact that many of them are also very common so that even if a similar portrait may be found in the bestiaries this does not carry much weight.⁷⁵ Moreover, save perhaps in a very limited number of cases,

⁷³ Ripon SSfW07.

⁷⁴ Lincoln SSfWR1_16.

⁷⁵ It is not unthinkable that animal portraits may be based on model books. Although only one model book survives from medieval Britain (Cambridge, Magdalene College, Pepysian Library MS 1916, c. 1375–99), it is likely that many more must have existed. The nucleus of the Pepysian sketch-book consists of eighteen leaves of figure studies and thirteen leaves of quadrupeds and birds. Many

a medieval audience, just like a modern one, would not have the necessary information to interpret these portraits. Whether a portrait of a lion is a symbol for Christ or the Devil is impossible to establish without further pointers. It could be argued that the location in a church of such a carving is such a pointer, if it had not been for the fact that misericords by virtue of their variety and lack of any 'programme' preclude this possibility.⁷⁶

The one exception I would make with respect to portraits concerns a few images that could be looked upon as having gained an (almost) emblematic quality. The *agnus dei* is a case in point; its significance usually leaves little room for alternative interpretations, but does the same apply to the portraits of mermaids or the elephant with howdah among our stalls?⁷⁷ Moreover, can we be sure that they are indeed based on bestiary illustrations? It would appear that in all these cases this is far from certain. Mermaids holding fishes, combs, brushes, and mirrors all do appear in the bestiaries,⁷⁸ even if the text describes them as bird-women, but it is their

of the latter are drawn from nature, but some go back to the other sources like the bestiaries, the beast epics, and fables. The pages freely mix portraits with narrative scenes. There are portraits of such creatures as the griffin (fols 19a, 22b), the camel, the porcupine, the dragon, the squirrel, the lion, the ape, the bear, and others (fol. 19b). Narrative scenes include the lion breathing life into a cub, an ostrich with a horseshoe in its beak, and a fox grabbing and running off with a cock (fol. 19b). For a facsimile of the sketchbook, see Montague Rhodes James, 'An English Medieval Sketch-Book, No. 1916 in the Pepysian Library, Magdalen College, Cambridge', in *The Thirteenth Volume of the Walpole Society 1924–1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1925). It is discussed in some detail in R. W. A. Scheller, *Exemplum: Model Book Drawings and the Practice of Artistic Transmission in the Middle Ages (Ca. 900–Ca. 1470)*, trans. by M. Hoyle (Amsterdam: Free University Press, 1995), pp. 201–10.

⁷⁶ The same applies to a lesser extent to capitals.

⁷⁷ For the mermaid see Gloucester SSfW 14, Lincoln NSfWR1_18, Ripon SSfW 06. The elephant only appears in Gloucester NSfW 24, although at Ripon it is found on a poppy-head (south side).

⁷⁸ Mermaids holding a mirror (and comb) appear, for example, in the Canterbury bestiary (Canterbury, Canterbury Cathedral Library, MS Lit. D 10, fol. 137^r) and the Queen Mary Psalter which is illustrated with bestiary drawings (London, British Library, MS Royal 2 B VII, fol. 97). In both illuminations the mermaid appears next to a boat of sleepy sailors. The first is illustrated in black and white in Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries*, fig. 108, and in colour in *Il Bestiario Medio Inglese (MS Arundel 292 Della British Library)*, ed. by Dora Faraci (L'Aquila: Japadre, 1990), pl. 9; for the latter, see Anne Payne, *Medieval Beasts* (London: British Library, 1990), p. 75. A mermaid holding a fish may be seen in the Harley bestiary (London, British Library, MS Harley 4751, fol. 47^v) and in Oxford, University College, MS 120, fol. 72. The Harley bestiary also places her next to a boat with sailors. The first is pictured in Jacqueline Leclercq-Marx, *La Sirène dans la pensée et dans l'art*

song that is moralized there in terms of luxuries and earthly pleasures, not the attributes they carry. The fishes the mermaid holds are not touched upon at all in the bestiaries and remain somewhat controversial to this day,⁷⁹ and this rules out any emblematic status. The comb and mirror are obviously symbols of vanity, but they go back to a different tradition that has nothing to do with the bestiary, though they do reinforce the notion of sirens as temptresses and may even hark back to the early Christian interpretation of the Homeric sirens as prostitutes.⁸⁰ But even if the mermaid with comb and brush constitutes an emblem, the bestiaries can certainly not be regarded as an important link in the transmission of this image. As to the elephant and castle, the bestiaries, following the *Physiologus*, interpret the elephant as a symbol of Christ when they relate how only the small elephant is able to raise the big elephant who has fallen and is unable to get up again because it lacks joints,⁸¹ but that does not mean that every elephant should be interpreted as such. The war elephant at Gloucester harks back to a different tradition,⁸² to accounts of the East where the Persians and Indians were said to use them in their battles. These details are also given in the bestiaries, and some even illustrate the elephant with howdah, but this account is not moralized,⁸³ thereby turning it more into a decorative design than an emblem. Apart from the mermaid with comb and mirror the only other clearly emblematic image is that of the pelican in her piety. It makes an appearance in all three stalls and almost everywhere else in medieval art.⁸⁴ This hieratic animal is first discussed in the *Physiologus*, from whence it passed to the

de l'antiquité et du moyen âge: du mythe païen au symbole Chrétien (Brussels: Académie Royale de Belgique, 1997), pl. 58, the last in George and Yapp, *Naming of the Beasts*, pl. 64.

⁷⁹ The same applies to the mermaid suckling a lion which also appears on misericords with some regularity.

⁸⁰ Cf. L. A. J. R. Houwen, 'Sex, Songs and Sirens: A New Score for an Old Song', *Profane Arts of the Middle Ages / Les Arts profanes du moyen âge*, 5 (1996), 103–22 (pp. 110–11). The tradition is discussed more fully in Leclercq-Marx, *La Sirène*, especially chap. 4. See also Siegfried Rachewiltz, *De Sirenibus: An Inquiry into Sirens from Homer to Shakespeare* (New York: Garland, 1987), pp. 110–11, and Ariela Erez, 'Misericords Carved by André Sulpice at the Cathedral of Rodez: Iconographic History and Analysis', *Profane Arts of the Middle Ages / Les Arts profanes du moyen âge*, 6 (1997), 288–92.

⁸¹ For a full account, see Clark, *Medieval Book of Beasts*, pp. 127–30.

⁸² NSfW24.

⁸³ As for example in London, British Library, MS Royal 12 F XIII, fol. 11^v from c. 1230–40. The beast is pictured in Clark, *Medieval Book of Beasts*, facing the title page.

⁸⁴ Gloucester SSfW 16, Lincoln NSfWR2_07, Ripon SSfW 13.

bestiaries where it is also illustrated. The *Physiologus* discusses it in Christological terms, presenting it as an emblem of Christ's salvation of mankind.⁸⁵ The earliest visual image of the pelican in her piety does not appear until the eleventh century, but it spreads rapidly thereafter.⁸⁶ The omnipresence of the emblem after the eleventh century, not to mention its relative uniformity, makes it very difficult to establish a firm link with the bestiaries. Whatever its visual source, it is likely that its meaning, first found in the *Physiologus* and the bestiaries and perpetuated in a wide variety of moral-didactic works thereafter, would have remained with it.

Apart from the two emblems discussed above we should consider a carving showing the mobbing of an owl at Gloucester (Figure 79),⁸⁷ the griffin grabbing a rabbit and another pecking at a human leg in Ripon, and the capture of the unicorn at Lincoln, all of which have been associated with the bestiary. Laird interprets a mobbing scene in Norwich cathedral as symbolizing 'a sinner under attack by the righteous, or an outright anti-semitism; the owl being the Jew who preferred darkness to Christian light, and his persecutors the Gentiles'.⁸⁸ Now it is true that a bird is discussed in these terms in the bestiaries, but it is not the owl (*bubo*) but the nightraven (*nycticorax*):

'The *nycticorax* is like the little owl in loving the night, for it is a bird that flees light, and cannot bear to see the sun.' 'This bird presents a figuration of the Jews, who, when the Lord Savior was approaching to save them, drove him away, saying, *We have no king but Caesar* (Jn 19:15), and *valued the darkness more than the light* (Jn 3:19). Then the Lord turned to our people and gave light to us sitting in the darkness and shadows of death (Is 9:2)', about which it is said, '*The people which I knew not served me* (2 Sm 22:44; Ps 17:45). And elsewhere the prophet said, *I will call that which was not my people, my people; and her that*

⁸⁵ For the *Physiologus* account, see *Physiologus Latinus: éditions préliminaires Versio B*, ed. by Francis J. Carmody (Paris: Librairie Droz, 1939), pp. 17–18.

⁸⁶ Clark, *Medieval Book of Beasts*, p. 178, refers to Gertrud Schiller and Janet Seligman, *Iconography of Christian Art* (London: Lund Humphries, 1971), II, 136, where it is said to occur first in the twelfth century, but the image appears in the eleventh-century Brussels *Physiologus* (Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale, MS 10066–74, fol. 143^v). A black-and-white image of this may be found in Ron Baxter, *Bestiaries and their Users in the Middle Ages* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1998), pl. 11.

⁸⁷ SSfW09.

⁸⁸ Marshall Laird, *English Misericords* (London: John Murray, 1986), pl. 66. Cf. also Anderson, *Misericords*, p. 15; Remnant, *Catalogue of Misericords*, p. xxxvii; Farley, *Misericords of Gloucester Cathedral*, no. 9; Rose, *Misericords of Norwich Cathedral*, p. 57; Grössinger, *World Upside-Down*, p. 142.



Figure 79. Owl being mobbed, Gloucester Cathedral, SSfW09.

was not beloved, beloved (Rom 9:25). Concerning the Jewish people, *The children that are strangers* and so on (Ps 17:46).⁸⁹

Nothing is said about its being mobbed in this chapter. For this we have to turn to the *Aviarium* where the mobbing is mentioned in the chapter devoted to the (eagle-)owl (*bubo*):

Its appearance is reported with great clamor by other birds; they also harass it with frequent attacks. For if a sinner comes near the light of knowledge, he furnishes a great opportunity for scorn to those behaving properly. And when he has been openly observed in sin, he hears words of rebuke from others. They pluck out his feathers and wound him with their

⁸⁹ “*Nycticorax ipsa est noctua, quia noctem amat, est enim avis lucifuga, et solem videre non patitur.*” “*Haec avis figuram gerit Iudorum, qui veniente Domino Salvatore ad salvandos eos reppulerunt eum, dicentes, Non habemus regem nisi Caesarem* (John 19. 15), et *plus dilexerunt tenebras quam lucem* (John 3. 19). Tunc Dominus convertit se ad nos gentes et illuminavit nos sedentes in tenebris et umbra mortis (Isaiah 9. 2),” de quibus dicitur, “*Populus quem non cognovi servivit mihi* (Psalm 17. 45; cf. 2 Samuel 22. 44). Et in alio propheta, *Vocabo non plebem meam plebem meam et non dilectam dilectam.* (Romans 9. 25) De populo Iudeorum, *Filii alieni* et cetera (Psalm 17. 46)”: Clark, *Medieval Book of Beasts*, chap. 69, pp. 178–79.

beaks, because those behaving properly rebuke the carnal deeds of a sinner, and condemn excess.⁹⁰

In other words, identifying an owl being mobbed as a symbol of the Jews is a little less likely than identifying it with sinners in general who refuse to see the light, and even that requires the conflation of a bestiary chapter with one from the *Aviaryum*.⁹¹ But why should we interpret it allegorically at all? Mobbing scenes like this one could simply represent a scene drawn from nature, even if they are iconographically close to *Bestiary-Aviaryum* illustrations. As Willene Clark notes:

The harassment of the owl was a well-known natural phenomenon, and was used as a method for trapping birds in ancient and medieval times. The bird-catcher would stake out a real or stuffed owl, and when the smaller birds attacked it, he would net them. This form of hunting is illustrated in a number of manuscripts [...] including the Bodley 764 Aviary (f. 73v [...]). The motif is pictured as early as a Roman mosaic in the City Museum of Oderzo [...]. Other examples include an East Anglian Book of Hours (Walters Art Gallery W. 105 [...]), a paving tile from the abbey church of Andres [...], choir sculpture at Poitiers Cathedral, a capital at the Musée des Augustins, Toulouse, and choir stall sculpture at Ely and Gloucester Cathedrals.⁹²

As we have seen, such depictions of everyday life are not unusual on misericords, and without any further context it is very difficult to guess what an artist was thinking of when he decided to adopt a particular design. Malcolm Jones would seem to agree. In his discussion of misericords at Beverley Minster he also questions the bestiary approach to some animals on misericords:

At least two subjects at Beverley, the misericords depicting the cat catching mice [70], and the hen with her chicks, might be considered as possible illustrations of exempla, short anecdotes or observations of everyday life which were inserted into sermons for the preacher to moralize. Historically, the tendency has been for scholars to assume such Bestiary-derived imagery brings with it its original Bestiary symbolism, more recently, however, such animal subjects have increasingly been seen as no more than observations of

⁹⁰ 'Ab aliis avibus visus magnis earum clamoribus proditur; magnis etiam incursionibus vexatur. Si enim peccator ad lucem cognitionis veniat, magnum bene agentibus derisionis quaestum praestat. Et cum in peccato aperte deprehensus fuerit, ab aliis verba reprehensionis audit. Plumas evellunt et rostro lacerant, quia carnales actus peccatoris bene agentes reprehendunt et superfluitatem damnant': *Medieval Book of Birds*, ed. and trans. by Clark, chap. 49, pp. 218–19. The mobbing is illustrated in e.g. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 764 and London, BL, MS Harley 4751, fol. 47. Both are bestiaries which incorporate aviary chapters. See *Medieval Book of Birds*, ed. and trans. by Clark, pp. 297, 288.

⁹¹ This type of conflation is not unusual in sermons and other moral-didactic texts.

⁹² *Medieval Book of Birds*, ed. and trans. by Clark, p. 219, n. 3.

natural history. The carving of the mobbed owl is another such subject, the owl sometimes representing, as in the Bestiary, the Jews. Whatever the metaphorical possibilities of such a representation, however, I suspect that, here again, the motif of the owl attacked from all sides by smaller birds simply afforded the artist the opportunity of executing a satisfying, aesthetic composition — a composition particularly well suited to the circular roofboss, for example, as at Sherborne.⁹³

In addition to the griffins carrying Alexander to heaven, these popular mythological beasts also appear in another narrative context which is sometimes associated with the bestiaries. In a number of misericords griffins are shown with another animal or even human being in their claws.⁹⁴ At Ripon it is shown carrying off a rabbit on the north side of the stalls and pecking at a human leg in the south (Figure 80).⁹⁵ Christa Grössinger refers to this last scene in her bestiary chapter but, apart from the fact that the griffin is a bestiary animal, she offers no reasons why it should be discussed here.⁹⁶ The bestiary's brief chapter on the griffin quotes Isidore's *Etymologiae* virtually verbatim and adds nothing new, nor does it moralize the animal. Isidore merely notes that it is an animal with feathers and four feet that partakes of both the lion and the eagle. Its most salient characteristic is that it is 'violently hostile to horses' and that 'they also tear humans apart when they see them'.⁹⁷ The griffin devouring a human leg at Ripon may well allude to this, but

⁹³ Malcolm Jones, 'The Misericords', in *Beverley Minster: An Illustrated History*, ed. by Rosemary E. Horrox (Beverley: Friends of Beverley Minster, 2000), p. 161. The mobbing scene at Beverley Minster appears on NSfWR2_09.

⁹⁴ In Chester Cathedral one griffin has grabbed a pig (NSfW12), and another holds a man in his claws (SSfW06). The last scene is also depicted in Carlisle Cathedral (SSfW19) and at Nantwich (SSfW01). In the church of St Mary at Whalley (Lancs.) a griffin has taken hold of a baby in swaddling clothes (SSfW09), but this is very likely a reference to the romance motif of a child being carried off by an animal. A griffin steals a (newborn) child in *Sir Eglamour of Artois*, *Southern Octavian*, and *Torrent of Portyngale*; see Gerald Bordman, *Motif-Index of the English Metrical Romances*, FF Communications, 190 (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1963), R15.1 and the summaries in *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050–1500*, vol. 1: *Romances*, ed. by Mortimer J. Donovan, and others (New Haven: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1967), pp. 124, 126, 127.

⁹⁵ NSfW17 and SSfW04.

⁹⁶ Grössinger, *World Upside-Down*, p. 138. Cf. also Bond, *Wood Carvings in English Churches: Misericords*, p. 61; and Anderson, *History and Imagery in British Churches*, p. 151.

⁹⁷ Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae XII / Etymologies Livre XII Des animaux*, ed. by André, XII.ii.17. For the translation, see Saint Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, trans. by Stephen A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach, and Oliver Berghof (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 252.



Figure 80. Griffin pecking at human leg, Ripon Cathedral, SSfW04.

there is no reason to assume that it must have been inspired by the bestiaries. The bestiaries usually show the griffin holding a pig, a ram, or an ox; only the Westminster bestiary shows a griffin holding the head of a prostrate man, and the Harley bestiary shows it with a biting horse.⁹⁸ Ripon's griffin with rabbit may simply be a variant on the animal-with-prey theme. If it was inspired by the encyclopaedic account of the griffin it just shows how far it has drifted away from its original sense for the artist to substitute such a small and weak animal for the more traditional ones. This leaves the capture of the unicorn scene at Lincoln (Figure 81).⁹⁹ According to the bestiary the unicorn, though only as large as a kid, is the most ferocious of animals and can only be tamed by a virgin. Spiritually Christ is the unicorn, 'about which it is said, *And as the beloved son of unicorns* (Ps 28. 6)'.¹⁰⁰ The animal's small size signifies Christ's humility. This particular scene is frequently

⁹⁸ For the first, see McCulloch, *Mediaeval Latin and French Bestiaries*, p. 123. The griffin and horse are printed in Payne, *Medieval Beasts*, p. 2.

⁹⁹ SSfWR1_05.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Clark, *Medieval Book of Beasts*, chap. 6, p. 126.



Figure 81. Capture of the unicorn, Lincoln Cathedral, SSfWR1_05.

illustrated in the bestiaries,¹⁰¹ and it stands to reason to assume some bestiary connection:

Especially popular on English misericords is the theme of the Capture of the Unicorn, based on compositions found in bestiaries (which, in contrast to the *Physiologus* from which they developed, were richly illustrated). According to the account in the bestiary, the unicorn will come to rest only in the lap of a virgin, a fact exploited by the hunters. Placing a virgin in a wood, they hide behind a tree, until the unicorn is attracted to the virgin, who even exudes an odour of chastity; they can then stab and kill the unsuspecting animal. In the religious interpretations of this scene the unicorn is Christ, and the virgin is the Virgin Mary, into whose womb Christ descended. The scene thus symbolizes the Incarnation; Christ, the Son of God, has humbled himself and become human, and his death will be the salvation of human kind.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ As George notes, '[a]lmost all the illustrations of *unicornis* in the bestiaries depict the story of the virgin'; George and Yapp, *Naming of the Beasts*, pp. 87–88; see also McCulloch, *Mediaeval Latin and French Bestiaries*, pp. 182–83.

¹⁰² Christa Grössinger, 'The Unicorn on English Misericords', in *Medieval Art: Recent Perspectives. A Memorial Tribute to C. R. Dodwell*, ed. by Gale R. Owen-Crocker (Manchester: University Press, 1998), pp. 142–58 (pp. 144–45).



Figure 82. Tristan and Isolde with King Mark behind them. Lincoln Cathedral, SSfWR1_06.

Here, however, it is the context in which this particular misericord appears that should make us pause and reconsider. The next misericord shows the episode from the Tristan romance alluded to earlier (Figure 82),¹⁰³ namely the scene in which Tristan and Isolde are in the garden where they spot King Mark just in time because his face is reflected in the 'pool' in front of the tree in which he has hidden himself. This allows the two lovers to pretend nothing has happened. Christa Grössinger has drawn attention to a French ivory casket, carved in Paris in the second quarter of the fourteenth century, in which this scene is placed next to that of the capture of the unicorn (Figure 83). The close association between that lover's casket and the Lincoln misericords, together with the fact that many misericords at Lincoln depict scenes from romances, leads her to conclude that the capture of the unicorn scene at Lincoln must be secular in intent, even if she still allows for the possibility that a spiritual meaning may also be intended.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Cf. p. 204.

¹⁰⁴ Grössinger, 'Unicorn on English Misericords', pp. 147, 148.



Figure 83. Scene from *Tristan and Isolde* next to the capture of the unicorn. French ivory casket, London, British Museum (fourteenth century). Courtesy British Library Board.

This means that among the almost three hundred animal scenes at Gloucester, Lincoln, and Ripon not a single scene can be said to be influenced by the bestiaries with any certainty, and even if we set all certainty aside, this would still only leave one or two possible candidates (pelican, griffin), and that is a far cry from what the scholarly literature has led us to expect. One could say that Gloucester, Lincoln, and Ripon are the exception that proves the rule, and until all the animal imagery on misericords has been studied in much greater detail the present results should be treated with some caution, but I would be very surprised if in the future these results were not broadly confirmed. Nevertheless, the above results are perhaps a little extreme. Some bestiary imagery certainly appears on misericords elsewhere in Britain. The knight riding a horse dropping mirrors while being pursued by a tigress is a case in point. A splendid example of this appears at Chester. Here the knight is not only seen dropping a mirror in front of a pursuing tigress, but in his lap he also carries a tiger cub which he has stolen from the mother. The mirror, of course, will occupy the tigress long enough for the thief to make his getaway (Figure 84). Iconographically this scene is closely akin to that found in the Aberdeen



Figure 84. Knight dropping mirrors to pursuing tigress, Chester Cathedral, NSfW21.

and related bestiaries like Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 1511,¹⁰⁵ but the misericord has been simplified a little in that the tree and the hill are omitted, but the knight's posture as well as that of the steed he is riding and the tigress are virtually identical. Cases such as this one do exist, even if the evidence looked at here does not suggest it, but their impact on the overall animal landscape is small.

It is true that animals need not be iconographically related to a bestiary to carry its meaning. As Mary Phillips Perry pointed out in her discussion of the stallwork of Bristol cathedral:

In medieval ecclesiastical art certain Bestiary animals, such as the unicorn, the lion, or the eagle, are constantly represented, but this is the result of the use made of these by the theologian. On account of the moralisation connected with them in the Bestiary they have been used by the preacher to illustrate the sermon for some particular festival until they were so familiar that their significance was at once recognised, and they practically became a secondary Christian symbol.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Folio 8^r; see <<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary/translat/8r.hti>> [accessed 3 March 2010].

¹⁰⁶ Mary Philips Perry, 'The Stallwork of Bristol Cathedral', *Archaeological Journal*, 28 (1921), 233–50 (p. 238).

But as we have seen, the number of animal images that have such an emblematic character is limited. Moreover, one cannot simply assume that the bestiaries always supplied the moralizations either. First, many animals in the bestiaries are not moralized at all. Broadly speaking moralizations tend to be limited to the original *Physiologus* entries, and only about a third of all animals fall in this category. Second, bestiaries are by no means the only source of moralized animal lore: one only has to think of Rabanus Maurus's encyclopaedia, *De rerum naturis*, or the moralized versions of other encyclopaedias like Bartholomaeus Anglicus's *De proprietatibus rerum*, in which the animal sections tend to be singled out for moralizations.¹⁰⁷ Aristotle's works on zoology also circulated in moralized form in later medieval Britain.¹⁰⁸ Not only were these works more 'respectable' by the time the carvers did their work, taken together they were also much more popular and widely disseminated.¹⁰⁹ A third problem concerns the nature of the moralizations. In the non-*Physiologus*-bestiary world animals rarely carry only one allegorical message, and this is true even of some of the most emblematic animals. As Meyer notes with respect to the pelican in *De proprietatibus rerum*: 'Die beim Pelikan-Beispiel in der christologischen Deutung noch präsente allegorisch-heilsgeschichtliche Sinndimension tritt im Randnotenapparat des Gesamtwerkes ganz zugunsten einer neuen *moralisatio* in den Hintergrund' ('The allegorical redemptive historical sense, which is still present in the Christological interpretation of the pelican example, is relegated to the background in favour of a new moralization in the marginal commentary of the work as a whole'). This, he shows, is not restricted to the pelican, it also applies to the eagle, the *nycticorax*, the ram, the lion, and the serpent as well as some plants and trees:

¹⁰⁷ Heinz Meyer, *Die Enzyklopädie des Bartholomäus Anglicus: Untersuchungen zur Überlieferungs- und Rezeptionsgeschichte von 'De Proprietatibus Rerum'*, Münstersche Mittelalter-Schriften, 77 (Munich: Fink, 2000), chap. 6. Another example of such a moralized encyclopaedia would be Pseudo-John of Folsham's thirteenth-century *Liber de naturis rerum*; see Dimitri Abramov, *Liber de naturis rerum von Pseudo-John Folsham: Eine moralisierende lateinische Enzyklopädie aus dem 13. Jahrhundert* (Munich: Fink, 2003).

¹⁰⁸ Baudouin van den Abeele, 'Une version moralisée du *De animalibus* d'Aristote (XIV^e siècle)', in *Aristotle's Animals in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. by Carlos Steel (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1999), pp. 338–54.

¹⁰⁹ Whatever role the bestiaries may have played in medieval education, by the late Middle Ages they had been surpassed by the encyclopaedias. For a discussion of the use of encyclopaedias in English schools, see Michael Twomey, 'Towards a Reception History of Western Medieval Encyclopaedias in England before 1500', in *Pre-Modern Encyclopaedic Texts: Proceedings of the Second Comers Congress, Groningen, 1–4 July 1996*, ed. by Peter Binkley (Leiden: Brill, 1997), pp. 332–40.

Durchgehend ist in diesen Artikeln zu beobachten, daß die traditionellen Inhalte der Allegorese nur noch in Restbeständen präsent und weithin durch neue Auslegungen des topologischen Sinnbereichs ersetzt sind. Die allegorisch-heilsgeschichtliche, auf Christus und die Kirche bezogene Auslegungsweise tritt stark zurück und ist durchschnittlich nur noch in jeder zehnten Deutung erhalten. Es überleben in diesem Sektor ganz offenbar nur besonders fest etablierte Deutungen wie die *significatio* des Adlers im Zusammenhang der Evangelistensymbole oder wie die zitierte christologische Auslegung des Selbstopfers des Pelikans. Dagegen entsteht eine neue inhaltliche Ausrichtung der Allegorese dadurch, daß etwa jede vierte Deutung dem Stand und den Tugenden der Kleriker gilt.¹¹⁰

[Throughout these chapters it may be observed that the traditional allegorical interpretations are only marginally present and have been replaced largely by new ones from the topological realm. The allegorical redemptive interpretation applied to Christ and the Church is very much relegated to the background and only survives in every tenth interpretation. In this area only the well-established interpretations survive like the *significatio* of the eagle as one of the symbols of the Evangelists or the Christological interpretation of the self-sacrifice of the pelican referred to earlier. A reorientation of the allegoresis is achieved by shifting the emphasis of about every fourth interpretation to apply to the position and virtues of the clergy.]

When preachers and others could pick and choose whatever allegorical or topological reading suited their purpose best, how can a medieval interpreter of animal imagery possibly be expected to identify the 'right' reading on the basis of an image alone? Perhaps we ought to allow for the possibility that the artists never intended their images to have only one sense, but allowed for multiple readings. In medieval allegories such multiple readings are of course perfectly acceptable. Many an animal like the lion could be interpreted in *bonam* and in *malam partem*. The notion of polysemous imagery may well solve some of the problems mentioned before, but it does not really address another impediment to the reading of animal imagery, moral or otherwise, namely the problem of the correct identification of the animal in question. The *Physiologus*, bestiaries, encyclopaedias, and a host of other textual sources provide a plethora of passages that would serve moral-didactic interpretations very well, but they would only work if the image leaves no doubt about what animal it is trying to depict. And, as we have seen, this is easier said than done. In other words, not only is there little conclusive evidence of direct bestiary influence, but attaching a single allegorical or moral reading to an animal carving is hazardous at best.

When it is so difficult to reach firm conclusions about how animal imagery was interpreted in the Middle Ages perhaps we ought to consider the possibility that

¹¹⁰ Meyer, *Die Enzyklopädie des Bartholomäus Anglicus*, p. 291.

many images were not primarily meant to be interpreted at all. In the Preface to *Pictor in Carmine* the anonymous author writing towards the end of the twelfth century laments the subject matter of paintings in medieval churches, particularly cathedral and parish churches. His brief account of the excesses reads like a description of a set of misericord carvings:

Struck with grief that in the sanctuary of God there should be foolish pictures, and what are rather misshapen monstrosities than ornaments, I wished if possible to occupy the minds and eyes of the faithful in a more comely and useful fashion. For since the eyes of our contemporaries are apt to be caught by a pleasure that is not only vain, but even profane, and since I did not think it would be easy to do away altogether with the meaningless paintings in churches, especially in cathedral and parish churches, where public stations take place, I think it an excusable concession that they should enjoy at least that class of pictures which, as being the books of the laity, can suggest divine things to the unlearned, and stir up the learned to the love of the scriptures.

For indeed — to touch but a few points out of many — which is more decent, which more profitable, to behold about the altar of God double-headed eagles, four lions with one and the same head, centaurs with quivers, headless men grinning, the so-called ‘logical’ chimaera, the fabled intrigues of the fox and the cock, monkeys playing the pipe, and Boethius’s ass and lyre.¹¹¹

The anonymous author’s indignation should not detract us from the fact that he regards such paintings (and by extension, carvings) as ‘foolish pictures’ and ‘ornaments’. Although he does concede that images may be used to instruct the laity, he here explicitly seems to rule out the animal world on misericords. Moreover, in the case of ‘misshapen monstrosities’ he even questions their ornamental value. That we know the English author of the *Pictor in Carmine* was not alone in this opinion is shown in similar remarks made by St Bernard of Clairvaux about Cluny.¹¹² So

¹¹¹ ‘Dolens in sanctuario dei fieri picturarum ineptias et deform(i)a quedam portenta magis quam ornamenta, optabam si fieri posset mentes oculosque fidelium honestius et utilius occupare. Cum enim nostri temporis oculi non solum uana sed etiam profana sepius uoluptate capiantur, nec facile putauerim inanes ecclesie picturas hoc tempore posse penitus abrogari, presertim in cathedralibus et baptismalibus ecclesiis ubi publice fiunt stationes, excusabilem arbitror indulgentiam, si uel eiusmodi picturis delectentur que tanquam libri laicorum simplicibus diuina suggerant, et literatos ad amorem excitent scripturarum. Siquidem, ut pauca tangamus de plurimis, quidnam decentius est, quid fructuosius, speculati circa dei altarium aquilas bicipites, unius eiusdemque capitis leones quatuor, centauros pharetratos (*al.* phaleratos) frementes acephalos, chimera ut fingunt logicam, fabulosa uulpis et galli diludia, simias tibicines et onos liras Boetii.’ For the text and the translation, see Montague Rhodes James, ‘Pictor in Carmine’, *Archaeologia*, 94 (1951), 141–66 (pp. 141–42).

¹¹² St Bernard of Clairvaux, ‘Apologia ad Guillelmum Abbatem’, in *S. Bernardi Opera III*, ed. by Jean Leclercq and Henri Marie Rochais (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1957), XII. 28–29.

perhaps many of the animal images on misericords are merely decorative.¹¹³ This is certainly consonant with some other fact we know about misericords, like the absence of any 'programme' for the carvings. The haphazard arrangement of misericords, the great variety of subjects, the numerous repetitions, the fact that many a narrative scene is 'contaminated' with alien elements which would only confuse the message if a message was intended, all of this supports the notion that their prime purpose may well have been purely ornamental. Anderson was right when he suggested that 'to aspire to certainty among the many fleeting allusions contained in medieval decoration is to court deception, but to ignore their possible derivations is to miss much of its charm'.¹¹⁴ But whether this charm would have gone much beyond the level of entertainment for a medieval audience is doubtful.

¹¹³ This does not necessarily rule out that some contemporary viewers did not associate some images with the bestiary or other allegorical or moral works, just as they may have been able to recognize a fable or episode from the beast epic or appreciate a scene from everyday life among the misericords.

¹¹⁴ Anderson, *Choir Stalls of Lincoln Minster*, p. 26.

PLAYING DEAD: THE BESTIARY FOX ON MISERICORDS AND IN THE *ROMAN DE RENART*

Kenneth Varty

One of the most surprising near-absences from the hundreds of topics depicted on medieval choir-stalls is, surely, that of the Bestiary fox. When Elaine Block and I published our joint study 'Choir-stall Carvings of Reynard and Other Foxes' in 2000, we drew on Elaine's unique knowledge of choir-stall carvings throughout Europe and North America, and we could find only two undoubted representations of that particular topic.¹ Given that many different Bestiaries were made and circulated in the Middle Ages, most of them containing a section on the fox and his trick to catch carrion birds by feigning death; given that the fox is usually said to represent the Devil whose wiles — and in particular this one of playing dead — must have been often referred to by preachers; given that this trick was often illustrated in manuscripts and in other visual art forms, it is difficult to account for its absence from choir-stalls.² This is even more puzzling in the case of France where not a single example survives, for it was here that the

¹ This is published in *Reynard the Fox: Social Engagement and Cultural Metamorphoses in the Beast Epic from the Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. by Kenneth Varty (New York: Berghahn, 2000), pp. 125–62. The Branches of the *Roman de Renart* referred to or quoted in this essay may be read in French in either of the following two editions where the Old French text is faced by a translation into modern French: Micheline de Combarieu du Grès and Jean Subrenat, 10/18. Bibliothèque Médiévale, 2 vols (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1981; repr. 1985); Jean Dufournet and Andrée Méline, 2 vols (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1985). For a translation into English, most of the branches will be found in D. D. R. Owen, *The Romance of Reynard the Fox* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

² For a highly readable, scholarly overview of medieval Bestiaries, see Barbara Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries: Text, Image, Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

Roman de Renart (in which the fox's bestiary trick often occurs in one form or another) was created in the twelfth century and proved to be popular throughout the Middle Ages.³ Elaine's *Corpus of Medieval Misericords: France* includes 3217 historiated misericords from which the Bestiary fox's trick is totally absent.⁴ Why, one wonders, is this so? It is often said that we have probably lost about 90 per cent of the misericords ever made, so it is possible that representations of the Bestiary fox were among them.

Let us first remind ourselves of the main points made in the Bestiaries about the way this trick is performed. They tell us that the fox first seeks out red dust or mud in which he rolls so that it will look as if he has been wounded and has bled. Then he lies on his back, holds his breath, opens his jaws wide, and lets his tongue loll out. Believing the fox to be dead, carrion crows will land upon him to peck at him, and some may even look into his open jaws. This is when he will suddenly spring to life and seize one of the unwary birds. In this way, the Bestiaries tell us, the fox resembles the Devil who is out to trick us, and into whose power we fall if we are unwary and not careful to avoid all manner of sins. Typical of many is the twelfth-century Bestiary kept in Cambridge University Library (MS I i, 4–20). This has been translated into English by T. H. White, and the relevant passage reads as follows:

VULPIS the fox gets his name from the person who winds wool (*volupis*) — for he is a creature with circuitous pug marks who never runs straight but goes on his way with tortuous windings. He is a fraudulent and ingenious animal. When he is hungry and nothing turns up for him to devour, he rolls himself in red mud so that he looks as if he were stained with blood. Then he throws himself on the ground and holds his breath, so that he positively does not seem to breathe. The birds, seeing that he is not breathing, and that he looks as if he were covered in blood with his tongue hanging out, think he is dead and come down to sit on him. Well, thus he grabs them and gobbles them up.

The Devil has the nature of this same. With all those who are living according to the flesh he feigns himself dead until he gets them in his gullet and punishes them. But for spiritual men of faith he is truly dead and reduced to nothing. Furthermore, those who wish to follow the devil's works perish, as the Apostle says: 'Know this, since if you live after the flesh you shall die, but if you mortify the doings of the foxy body according to the spirit

³ For a history of the *Roman de Renart*, see John Flinn, *Le Roman de Renart dans la littérature française et dans les littératures étrangères au Moyen Âge* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963). For a literary history in English, see Thomas W. Best, *Reynard the Fox* (Boston: Twayne, 1983).

⁴ Elaine C. Block, *Corpus of Medieval Misericords: France* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003).

you shall live'. And the Lord God says: 'They will go into the lower parts of the earth, they will be given over to the power of the sword, they will become a portion of the foxes'.⁵

Bestiaries in French will have been well known in France and to francophones, and in particular to the authors of the *Roman de Renart*, including Philippe de Thaun (writing between 1120 and 1130), Richard de Fournival, and Gervaise (both writing in the thirteenth century).⁶ In any event, the Bestiary fox's trick appears in numerous places and in various forms in this French beast epic.

Perhaps its earliest appearance occurs in the Chantecler episode of Branch II. Here Renart penetrates a poultry yard where he tries to hide by rolling himself into a ball among a patch of red cabbages (a variation, surely, on the red mud disguise) before getting close to the cockerel and trying to get it to sing with its eyes closed (inspired by the carrion crow's 'blindness'?). As Elaine Block's survey of French misericords shows, some of them depict a fox trying to capture a cock, or having captured one, but none shows it feigning death or even hiding before launching its attack.⁷ The earliest undoubted use of the Bestiary fox motif is also in Branch II, in the Tiecelein episode. This is where the fox flatters the crow's ability to sing in order to get it to drop the cheese it holds in its beak. Not content with his success in getting the crow to drop its cheese, the fox pretends to be so badly wounded that he persuades the crow to fly down with the aim of adding crow meat to the meal ahead. In the end, all he manages to get are a few crow feathers, but it is a fascinating fact that the miniature which illustrates this episode in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS f. fr. 1580 (dated about 1375) shows the fox lying on his back beneath the tree in which the crow perches, and this in a typical Bestiary fox manner.⁸

In Branch XIII, *Renart teint en noir* (Renart dyed black), early thirteenth century, Renart tries to catch a crow by feigning death, lying on his back, paws pointing upwards, tongue lolling out. His trick works, and the crow is caught by the neck. In Branch XVII, *La Mort et Procession Renart* (Renart's death and funeral procession), also early thirteenth century, there is a duel between Chantecler the

⁵ T. H. White, *The Book of Beasts* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1984), pp. 53–54.

⁶ See the index to Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries*, for these three authors.

⁷ See, for example, the illustrations in Block, *Corpus of Medieval Misericords: France*, pp. 318 and 370.

⁸ See Anthony Lodge, 'Pierre de Saint Cloud and the *Bestiary*', in *The University of Glasgow International Beast Epic Colloquium, 23–25 September 1975*, ed. by K. Varty, published privately at the French Department of the University of Glasgow, pp. 37–45. The miniature in question is reproduced on p. 43.

cockerel and Renart. Just as the cockerel is on the point of victory, the fox feigns death in order to avoid being killed. Thinking him dead, Chantecler leaves the scene. As he does so, Rohart the crow and his wife Brune arrive and, taken in by the fox's inert pose, they land on him in order to eat his flesh. Springing to life, he grabs Rohart by the leg and bites it off. This incident plays an important role in the story because the lame crow goes to the lion-king and demands justice. This results in the badger's mission to Renart's castle-den to summon him to the royal court to answer for this unprovoked attack on the crow. However, fox and badger work out a plan to avoid a trial. The badger returns to court and informs the lion that Renart has died of the injuries which Chantecler had inflicted on him. And four of the great anthologies we call the *Roman de Renart* end with this story with the Bestiary fox trick at its centre.⁹

Here and there in both these and other Renart anthologies there are passing references to the fox's Bestiary trick and to minor variations on it. In Branch VI, *Le Duel* (The duel), Tiecelein recalls how Renart had tried to catch him in the Tiecelein part of Branch II. In Branch V, *Le Bacon enlevé* (The stolen side of ham), we are told that Renart caught an unnamed crow by the head after it had landed on him thinking him to be dead. In Branch VII, *La Confession Renart* (Renart's confession), the fox pretends to commit suicide then springs to life when an unwary kite gets sufficiently close to him for an attempt to be made on it, but the fox just misses and the bird gets away.

There are also several more imaginative variations of this motif in which the intended victim is other than a bird. For example, in Branch III, *Les Poissons* (The fish), Renart plays dead on a road along which he knows fishermen will soon come with a cartload of fish. He rightly guesses that when they see what looks like a dead fox lying across their path they will halt and pick him up with a view to making use of his fur. Once they have thrown him into their cart on top of their catch he comes to life (out of sight of the fishermen) and takes his fill. A miniature illustrating this episode in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS f. fr. 12584 (late fourteenth century) depicts the fox in typical Bestiary fox manner.¹⁰ And this particular episode was later retold, modified a little, in subsequent Dutch, English, and German versions of the Beast Epic.

⁹ These are the manuscripts known as D, H, C, and M. They are, respectively, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 360; Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, MS 3334; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS f. fr. 1579; and Turin, Biblioteca Reale, MS cod. Varia 151.

¹⁰ To the best of my knowledge, this miniature has not yet been reproduced.

A further development occurs when, in Branch V, *Le Bacon enlevé* (The stolen side of ham), Renart, on seeing a peasant carrying a large side of ham, pretends to be so badly wounded that the peasant thinks the fox can easily be captured. Isengrin the wolf is in league with the fox and, when the peasant chases Renart, the wolf makes off with the ham which the peasant had put down in order to chase the fox. In one of the anthologies, BnF, MS f. fr. 1579, the fox even lies down, feigning death, in order to encourage the peasant to go for him. As soon as the man gets near the fox, he springs to life and makes off.¹¹ In Branch XI, *Renart empereur* (The emperor Renart), composed about 1200, Renart is so badly wounded in a fight with two kites that, covered in blood, he collapses and would seem to be dead. In this state he is seen by a mounted travelling knight, his squire, and a servant boy. They decide to take the 'dead' fox with them for its fur, so the boy picks it up and throws it over his shoulder so that the fox's head dangles down behind his bottom. As soon as Renart recovers consciousness and has weighed up the situation, he bites one of the boy's buttocks and escapes.

The Bestiary fox's trick is even performed by other animals. One of Renart's many enemies is the dog Rooneel who, on one occasion (in Branch Va, *Le Serment de Renart*, Renart's solemn oath, composed about 1180), tries to deceive the fox by feigning death. As the fox approaches, Rooneel says to himself, 'I'll lie down, show my teeth, let my neck go limp and hold my tongue out',¹² but he fails to hold his breath long enough and Renart sees through the trick. In Branch XIV, *Les Aventures de Renart et de Primaute* (The adventures of Renart and Primaute), Renart even gets the wolf to try playing dead in order to steal fish from some fishermen in much the same way as he had done in Branch III. But the wolf fails to convince the fishermen who pounce upon him and beat him up. In fact, before advising the wolf to play dead, Renart retells the story of the way he deceived fishermen in Branch III, and later versions of this retelling get longer and longer. For example, in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS f. fr. 20043 (thirteenth century) it occupies 134 lines; in BnF, MS f. fr. 1579 (late thirteenth or early fourteenth century) it occupies 300 lines.¹³ This suggests that this particular version of the Bestiary fox's trick, with fish

¹¹ See *Le Roman de Renart*, ed. by N. Fukumoto and others, 2 vols (Tokyo: Tosho, 1983–85), vol. I, lines 11,635–60, pp. 379–80.

¹² See Dufournet's and Méline's edition, I, 387, lines 108–09, for the original Old French of the two lines translated here.

¹³ Compare the 134 lines in Dufournet and Méline's edition, vol. II, beginning on p. 319 at line 507 with the 300 lines in *Roman de Renart*, ed. by Fukumoto, vol. I, beginning on p. 115 at line 253.

rather than birds in the intended victims' role, became more enjoyed with the passage of time. In Branch IX, *Lietart, Renart et la mort de Brun* (Lietart, Renart, and the death of Brun the bear), it is the farmer Lietart's ass which feigns death just outside the fox's castle-den. He does this in the hope that Renart and his wife would try to drag his 'corpse' into their den by attaching his reins to themselves. As soon as they were bound to him in this way, he would spring to life and drag them off to his master. In order to feign death the ass stretches himself out and covers his snout with dust. This is the only time this use of dust, often mentioned in this context in the Bestiaries, is mentioned in the *Roman de Renart*. The trick nearly works. Only the fox's wife gets dragged off, and she escapes at the last minute when Lietart tries to strike her with a sword but succeeds only in cutting off one of the ass's legs, the one to which the vixen was bound.

To sum up so far, there are quite a lot of examples in the *Roman de Renart* of the Bestiary trick proper (fox tries to catch birds by feigning death), and modifications in which the fox either deliberately or accidentally appears to be dead and unwary passers-by are deceived; and then there are other animals than the fox which feign death hoping to achieve a similar objective, but always fail to do so.

Next, we should take into account the fact that, while the Bestiary fox's trick made numerous appearances in the *Roman de Renart* in one form or another, Renart, the villainous hero of that animal epic, made some appearances in some Bestiaries. In Philippe de Thaun's Bestiary, composed sometime during the twelfth century and before the creation of the *Roman de Renart*, the fox is referred to only by his generic name in Old French, *goupil*. 'The fox signifies the Devil in this life. To people living carnally he shows pretence of death, till they are entered into evil, caught in his mouth. Then he takes them by a jump and slays and devours them, as the fox does the bird when he has allured it.'¹⁴ In Richard de Fournival's thirteenth-century Bestiary, the fox is first referred to by the generic name, *goupil*, then by the proper name, *Renart*. 'The fox's nature is such that, when he is hungry and cannot find anything to eat, he rolls over in red mud and lies down with his mouth wide open and tongue hanging out as if he had bled to death. Then magpies, who think he is dead, come hoping to eat his tongue. Then he snaps his jaws together, seizes them by the head and devours them [...]. Oh, Renart, how deceitfully you let your tongue hang out!'¹⁵ A later, anonymous thirteenth-century Bestiary uses only

¹⁴ See Francis Bond, *Misericords* (Edinburgh: Darien, 1910), p. 36. My translation.

¹⁵ See *Le Bestiaire d'Amour de Richard de Fournival*, ed. by C. Segre (Milan: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1987), pp. 99, 100, and 135. My translation.

the fox's proper name: 'Renart is so full of trickery that there is no bird he cannot draw to him.'¹⁶ Clearly, as the reputation of the villainous hero of the *Roman de Renart* grew, the Bestiary fox became identified with him.

Finally before examining the two extant misericords of the fox playing dead, it is perhaps as well to remind ourselves that the Bestiary fox's stratagem was also adapted by the fox in the Dutch Beast Epics of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, *Reinaert de Vos* and *Reinaerts Historie* from which it eventually passed into Caxton's *History of Reynard the Fox* (1481) and the Low German *Reynke de Vos* (1498) each of which led to renewed retellings in English, Low and High German, and other Germanic languages.¹⁷ The example of the fox's playing dead that comes to mind occurs when Corbant the rook complains to the lion of the way in which the fox killed his wife Sharpbeak. It goes like this in a modernized version of Caxton's text:

Dear lord, hear me! I went today by the morrow with Sharpbeak, my wife, for to play upon the heath and there lay Reynard the fox down on the ground like a dead caitiff. His eyes stared and his tongue hung long out of his mouth like a hound had been dead. We tasted and felt his belly, but we found thereon no life. Tho went my wife and harkened and laid her ear tofore his mouth for to wit if he drew breath, which misfell her evil. The false fox awaited well his time and when he saw her so nigh him he caught her by the head and bit it off.¹⁸

Similar complaints are made in the Low and High German retellings, so one might have thought that there would have been choir-stall representations of this trick in Holland, Germany, and other nearby countries, but Elaine has found not a single example.¹⁹ The only two extant examples are English, and both are to be found in Cheshire, and both are from the fourteenth century. The fact that only two survive makes the way I discovered them especially interesting. It was only a few hours after I had given a lecture on the *Roman de Renart* in the University College of North Staffordshire (now Keele University) in the Spring Term of 1959, I found myself in St Mary's Church, Nantwich, looking at some fourteenth-

¹⁶ See *Le Bestiaire d'amour rimé: poème inédit du XIII^e siècle*, ed. by Arvid Thordstein (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1941), pp. 105–06. My translation.

¹⁷ For further information about the Dutch and German epics, and Caxton's version, see Best, *Reynard the Fox*.

¹⁸ Quoted from D. B. Sands, *Reynard the Fox* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), pp. 85–86.

¹⁹ For the Low and High German retellings, and their descent from the Dutch, see Jean R. Scheidegger, *Le Roman de Renart* (Geneva: Droz, 1989), especially pp. 68–70.

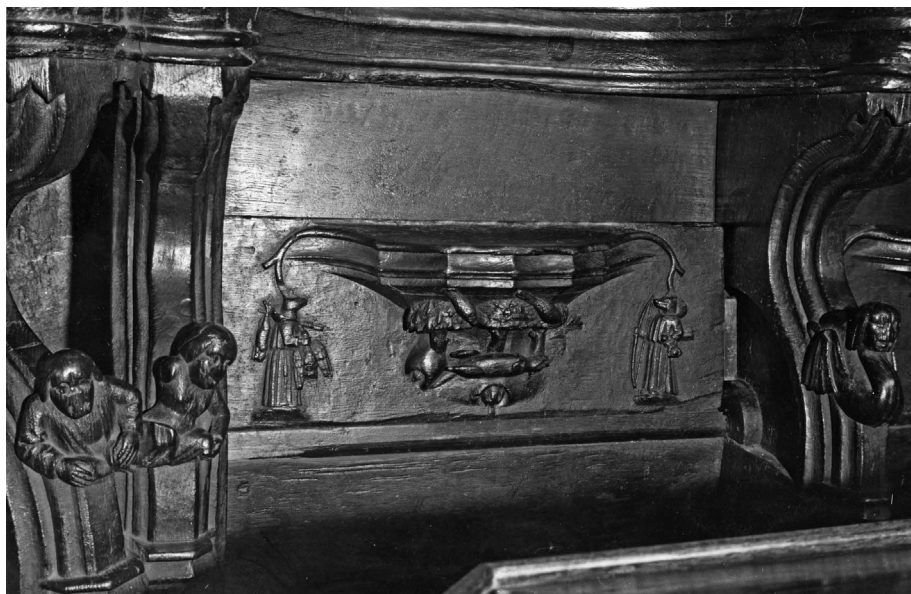


Figure 85. Misericord, St Mary's Church, Nantwich, Cheshire. Photo by Elaine C. Block.

century misericord carvings of a fox disguised as a friar (Figure 85). As far as I can remember, these were the very first misericords I had looked at with any care. I began to ask myself what this fox was doing dressed as a religious next to the central carving which seemed to depict a fox lying dead beneath a tree on which some birds were perched. Did they, I wondered, represent a story of Reynard the Fox I did not know? I might have left the question unanswered if I had not, that same afternoon, found four more fox misericords in the choir-stalls of Chester Cathedral, only a relatively short distance from Nantwich. I began to wonder if the *Roman de Renart* was not better known to the English of the Middle Ages than the few extant pre-Caxton poems and references suggest. So began my research into visual representations of the fox in the Middle Ages. In short, in the first five misericords I discovered, two depicted the fox playing dead. Nearly fifty years later, and aware of thousands more misericord scenes, chiefly through the research of Elaine Block, this immensely well-known topic remains almost totally absent from extant choir-stall carving although it is well represented in manuscript drawings. And it is not as if Bestiary scenes were taboo because many other Bestiary topics are to be found on misericords. Curiously other playing dead (non-Bestiary) motifs are also totally absent from misericords. One thinks of the cat which catches rats by feigning death, and the leopard which catches apes by means of the same trick. Visual representations



Figure 86. Misericord, Chester Cathedral, Cheshire. Photo by Elaine C. Block.

of these other animals catching their prey this way are still to be seen, but not on misericords.

As stated above, the two extant fourteenth-century Bestiary fox misericords are to be found in Cheshire, in towns relatively near each other. Even so, they are very dissimilar in detail, and the reasons for seeing in them a possible influence of the *Roman de Renart* or other similar fox lore are also quite different.

In Chester Cathedral we see, in the central scene, the fox lying on his back, jaws gaping wide, tongue lolling out. In the foliage of some trees above are three birds (Figure 86). The central and righthand birds are badly damaged. Three others have ventured to descend and are pecking at the fox, two at his belly and one at his tongue. On the right supporter we see the fox, presumably moments later, killing one of these birds. Thus far, this seems to be a clear representation of the Bestiary fox about its business, especially in the detail of the bird pecking at the fox's tongue. The first hint that this is about more than the Bestiary fox is to be found in some details in the central scene behind the fox's back. Here, to the left, we see a smaller-scale fox disappearing down a hole with a web-footed victim. From another hole peep three more foxes. In several episodes in the *Roman de Renart*, the fox takes his

prey to his wife and sons. This is the case in Branch XVII where he takes home Rohart the rook's right thigh. Then, on the left supporter, is the lion, curled up beneath some trees. Is this the Bestiary lion or Noble, king of the animals in the *Roman de Renart*? Among other things, we know that the Bestiary lion symbolized vigilance. Since the lion may be sleeping, it is possible that the carver merely aimed to show what can happen if one is not vigilant. Then again, the lion may represent Christ, so the carver may have meant to remind the onlooker that even if the evil-doer (the fox) did seem to get away with his misdeeds now, he eventually had to answer for them before Christ. It is equally possible, given that the Bestiary fox became identified with Renart, that the carver had in mind the theme of Renart eventually having to answer for his crimes before Noble.

In the central scene in St Mary's church in Nantwich, we find the fox feigning death beneath some trees in which are perched two birds, both badly mutilated. There are traces of a bird, to the right, which had flown down and was pecking at the fox's tongue. It is on the supporters that we find details suggesting that the carver had Renart in mind. On the left stands a fox in Franciscan friar's clothes with a dead hare (Couart, the hare in the *Beast Epic*?) dangling from a stake held over his left shoulder, and a dead duck dangling by the neck from his left hand. In the *Roman de Renart* the fox is frequently depicted wearing the disguise of a religious to overcome his intended victim's caution, and we know that Couart the hare was captured by him at the beginning of the story of his 'pilgrimage'.²⁰ It is as if the carver jumps from one story to another, from the general to the particular, from the Bestiary fox's ruse to one of Renart's. On the right supporter the fox is again dressed as a Franciscan, but armed with a bow — a clear indication of his hypocrisy. In his left hand he holds what may well be a money bag with which to bribe the lion should he be brought before him to answer for his misdeeds, actual or planned. The readiness of the lion to be bribed by the fox is one of the basic characteristics of the *Roman de Renart*, its sources, derivatives, and parallels.

To conclude, I have left till now one more detail in the Chester misericord which points to a connection with the *Roman de Renart*. In drawing attention to the playing dead scene in Branch V, *Le Bacon enlevé*, I deliberately omitted to mention that in some later manuscripts (for example, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS f. fr. 371, late twelfth century, and BnF, MS f. fr. 1579, late thirteenth or

²⁰ For the fox's religious disguises, see Kenneth Varty, *Reynard, Renart, Reinaert and Other Foxes in Medieval England: The Iconographic Evidence* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999), pp. 55–86.

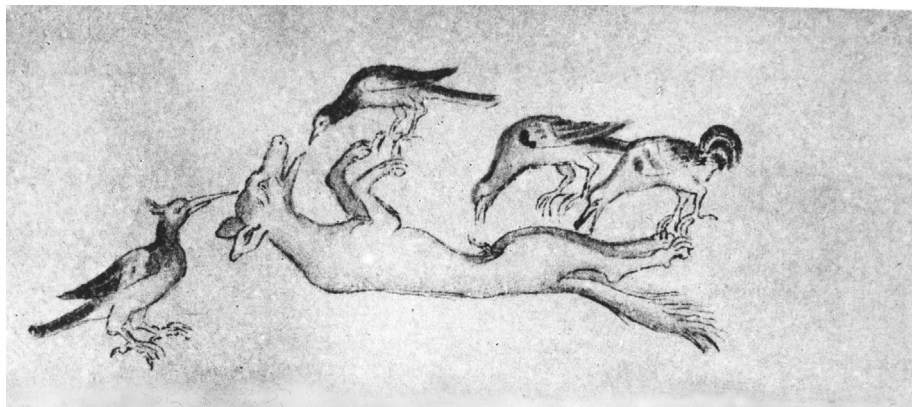


Figure 87. From *Queen Mary's Psalter: Miniatures and Drawings by an English Artist of the 14th Century*; Reproduced from *Royal MS. 2 B. VII in the British Museum*, intro. by George Warner (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1911), p. 156. Reproduced with permission.

early fourteenth century),²¹ we are told that the fox exposes his penis as he lies on his back under a tree, and that the crow which he had seen perched above flew down and began to peck at it. And this is when Renart came to life and caught the crow. In the Chester misericord a crow is about to peck the end of the fox's prominent penis. I have not been able to find this mentioned in any Bestiary; so it may well have passed into Bestiary-inspired tales, carvings, and drawings from the *Roman de Renart*. And I think it very likely that the fox playing dead was depicted on quite a lot of lost misericords.

²¹ For the text of BnF, MS f. fr. 1579, see *Roman de Renart*, ed. by Fukumoto, vol. II, lines 1145–64. Compare with Figure 87 from the Queen Mary Psalter, in which a bird is shown about to peck at the fox's penis. Varty, *Reynard, Renart, Reinaert*, ill. 163, p. 177, shows a cockerel about to do the same.

MEDIEVAL TEXTS AND CULTURES OF NORTHERN EUROPE

All volumes in this series are evaluated by an Editorial Board, strictly on academic grounds, based on reports prepared by referees who have been commissioned by virtue of their specialism in the appropriate field. The Board ensures that the screening is done independently and without conflicts of interest. The definitive texts supplied by authors are also subject to review by the Board before being approved for publication. Further, the volumes are copyedited to conform to the publisher's stylebook and to the best international academic standards in the field.

Titles in Series

Drama and Community: People and Plays in Medieval Europe, ed. by Alan Hindley (1999)

Showing Status: Representations of Social Positions in the Late Middle Ages, ed. by Wim Blockmans and Antheun Janse (1999)

Sandra Billington, *Midsummer: A Cultural Sub-Text from Chrétien de Troyes to Jean Michel* (2000)

History and Images: Towards a New Iconology, ed. by Axel Bolvig and Phillip Lindley (2003)

Scandinavia and Europe 800–1350: Contact, Conflict, and Coexistence, ed. by Jonathan Adams and Katherine Holman (2004)

Anu Mänd, *Urban Carnival: Festive Culture in the Hanseatic Cities of the Eastern Baltic, 1350–1550* (2005)

Björn Bandlien, *Strategies of Passion: Love and Marriage in Medieval Iceland and Norway* (2005)

Imagining the Book, ed. by Stephen Kelly and John J. Thompson (2005)

Forms of Servitude in Northern and Central Europe: Decline, Resistance, and Expansion, ed. by Paul Freedman and Monique Bourin (2005)

Grant Risee? The Medieval Comic Presence / La Présence comique médiévale. Essays in Honour of Brian J. Levy, ed. by Adrian P. Tudor and Alan Hindley (2006)

Urban Theatre in the Low Countries, 1400–1625, ed. by Elsa Strietman and Peter Happé (2006)

Gautier de Coinci: Miracles, Music, and Manuscripts, ed. by Kathy M. Krause and Alison Stones (2006)

The Narrator, the Expositor, and the Prompter in European Medieval Theatre, ed. by Philip Butterworth (2007)

Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World: Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross, ed. by Judy Quinn, Kate Heslop, and Tarrin Wills (2007)

Essays in Manuscript Geography: Vernacular Manuscripts of the English West Midlands from the Conquest to the Sixteenth Century, ed. by Wendy Scafe (2007)

Parisian Confraternity Drama of the Fourteenth Century, ed. by Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox (2008)

Broken Lines: Genealogical Literature in Medieval Britain and France, ed. by Raluca L. Radulescu and Edward Donald Kennedy (2008)

Laments for the Lost in Medieval Literature, ed. by Jane Tolmie and M. J. Toswell (2010)

Medieval Multilingualism: The Francophone World and its Neighbours, ed. by Christopher Kleinhenz and Keith Busby (2010)

In Preparation

Historical Narratives and Christian Identity on a European Periphery: Early History Writing in Northern, East-Central, and Eastern Europe (c. 1070–1200), ed. by Ildar H. Garipzanov

Emilia Jamroziak, *Survival and Success on Medieval Borders: Cistercian Houses in Medieval Scotland and Pomerania from the Twelfth to the Late Fourteenth Century*

Normandy and its Neighbours, 900–1250: Essays for David Bates, ed. by David Crouch and Kathleen Thompson